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VICTOR AND VANQUISHED.

A Novel.

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By MARY CECIL HAY,
AUTHOR OF "OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY," "THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY," &c.

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VICTOR AND VANQUISHED.

CHAPTER I.

AMONG THE HILLS.

I WOULD rather not state exactly whether it lies in the North of England, or the South, or the East, or the West, for some old inhabitant may swoop down upon me with proof of the fogginess of my memory, or the inaccuracy of my local geography. But I do assert that Highshire is one of England's most beautiful counties, and that it owes its beauty chiefly to the glorious hills that guard, and almost encircle, the small county town of Churchill. Hill beyond hill, hill behind hill, they stretch for twenty miles. The highest of the group—throughout the district called, *par excellence*, The Mountain—rises seventeen hundred feet above the level of the sea. Yet its ascent is easy now, as a carriage-drive has been constructed round it, railed to insure the safety of the many horses which are brought here through the summer months. The summit of the mountain is a vast table-land, and its sides are rich in furze and heath and bracken; but it is hardly so favorite a resting-place for the picnic parties which flock here from spring to autumn, as is the beautiful ravine which separates the mountain from the opposite hills.

At the head of this ravine, a restless stream falls over the rocks, and forms a cascade of considerable height; then, following its irregular course, it dances on, from right to left, and left to right, through the soft green turf, while countless small streams from the hills opposite rush, with a laughing music, down to join it, swelling it at last to an imposing rivulet before it darts from the turf under the low stone bridge below the valley gate. For the low sweep of level turf, lying between the mountain and the chain of smaller hills, is wide enough here (where it meets the road) to be termed a valley, though but a narrow and a rugged ravine where the hills close above it near the water-fall. Behind and beyond the fall, as the ravine grows wilder and more rugged, and the hills tower higher still on either side, the scene is wild and desolate, the isolation complete, and the way dangerous. The sides of the hills are so broken into deep, narrow passes with precipitous sides, and the rocks rise, now so sharp and pointed, now so treacherous in their smooth, sheer descent, that what wonder is it that in Churchill records there are names of those who have been lost among these hills?

A little above the fall, and in a hollow which the foot-path does not reach, though it is gradual and verdant, lies a silent mountain tarn, a still lake, which has an unspeakable gloom about it, beyond that gloom which seems to belong to all water lying in the shadow of the hills. No one who stands a moment upon its brink, wondering at its stillness, but is glad to leave it, and pass down into the valley, where the sunshine falls so widely and so warmly.

But we can leave the valley now. We pass through the gate, beside which stands a picturesque little cottage, where tea is provided for picnic parties, and stabling for the horses, which are seldom taken beyond here, and find ourselves out in the turnpike-road. On our right, bordering the valley, lies the steep, well-ordered garden of the rectory; and from its sloping drive, or from the door of the handsome modern house, our eyes can take in a wide stretch of the valley below. Behind, the carriage-drive round the mountain skirts the farm-yard of the rectory; for the Reverend Henry Jorden is no mean farmer, and his comely wife does not fancy the produce of any dairy but her own.

A quarter of a mile more of wide, white road we traverse, and then we come upon the old gray church, standing high and grave among the mountain shadows, looking always down upon the one steep street which forms the little town of Churchill. Midway down this long street stands the old-fashioned pump, with its three lamps above; and opposite this, a narrow side-street ends abruptly in the railway-station. We pass the sleepy shops and quaint old houses of the main thoroughfare, and reach the more pretentious dwellings in the suburbs, dwellings over whose gray stone walls the holly bulges with a look of comfortable abundance, hiding the "genteel villa" from the vulgar gaze. Then again, we find ourselves in the hedge-bound road, which winds on before us to Bleaborough, the county town of Highshire; and behind us, through Churchill, on, and on, and on, to London.

Two miles, uninterrupted by any dwelling we need mention, then upon our right rises the high gray wall which bounds the park of High Athelston, broken presently by the bronze gates and ivy-covered lodges. Two lamps hang high above the gates, and between them stands a great stone shield, bearing the arms of the Athelstons—a leopard couchant. A grand old mellow house is High Athelston, standing among the rich and heavy trees, as it has stood for centuries. From the wide gates a stately avenue leads to the pillared entrance. Passing this without entering, we descend one of the flights of steps which lead from terrace to terrace on the western side of the house, and turn aside into a by-path across the park; thread our way through a sombre shrubbery, where thick, dark arches of yew and holly make twilight of the sunniest summer noon; and

reach a narrow green door in the north wall of the park. Passing through this, saluted noisily from the rookery in the high old limes above us, we find ourselves in Nether Lane, a narrow road bordered by two rows of low elms, which in summer-time throw heavy bars of shade across the sunlit way. Midway between this door and Churchill—for the lane merges into the high-road on the outskirts of the town—stand the only two cottages which the lane contains. They are built under one roof, and lie back in a vegetable-garden, divided into two by a narrow paling. The sheltering trees do not extend beyond the cottages; the lane is open then, and when we reach the end we stand once more in the suburbs of Churchill.

But we have now a journey to make beyond the town in the opposite direction; so again we pass the picturesque old lamp half-way up the hilly street; linger a moment looking into the peaceful church-yard; then walk on along the highway, which the Churchill people designate "the London road," while on the other side of the town it is known only as "the Bleaborough road."

And now, after only a few minutes' walk, we reach The Anchorage, the pleasant sunny little estate of Colonel Alick Stuart, who brought his young wife here four years ago, but is a widower now, and has his sister and her little boy staying with him.

On still further from the town, back among the woods and close down beside the lazy river, lies the old manor-house of Hawkedale, which has been in the possession of the Castillains for almost as long a time as the Athelstons have held sway at High Athelston; and which is possessed now by the first Castillain who, for two hundred years, has had no son to succeed him; a matter of rejoicing among those who believe in the old proverb, "Like father, like son." A handsome old manor is Hawkedale, but both without and within are evidences unmistakable of the grinding nature of its old master, whose mania for saving is as inexplicable as it is pitiful.

Heaven only knew—as his younger daughter used to say—for what or whom he had been saving through all his three-score years and ten, and would save still for three-score years and ten more, if the pleasure could be extended for him through that length of time. No; Heaven only knew!

"We have nothing here as they have at High Athelston or at The Anchorage," would sometimes be the thought of Marjorie Castillain, as she tried with her own hands to cut the shrubs, or get her flowers to bloom in the old conservatories, which were not even weather-proof. "At High Athelston they have every thing to make the place magnificent; luxuries and games and enticements everywhere; great stone figures on the terraces, and splendid foreign trees and shrubs; and servants to keep the place beautiful from end to end. And at The Anchorage they have—oh! such rare, sweet flowers, and such a wonderful atmosphere of peace and ease and rest! while we—well, we have our grim old trees, at any rate," the girl would add, with laughing philosophy, "and our river; and these two things have a beauty of their own which the famous family miserliness can not extinguish."

And now we have ended our walk round Churchill.

One high lamp flickers feebly upon the platform of the Churchill station, and one burns a little more steadily in the booking-office. The down express has just gone on its way, after having deposited one passenger, and two boxes which the porter is carrying. The station-master, holding in leash two handsome greyhounds, which have the couchant leopard embroidered on their coats, stops and speaks respectfully to the solitary passenger upon the platform.

"We've a fire in the office, miss. If you'll stay there, I'll see that all is right about your luggage."

There are moments when a kind word will summon tears which coldness can not bring, and for Lina Chester this was one. She felt them starting painfully to her eyes as she answered that she had hoped a cab would be here to take her to High Athelston.

"Not yet, miss," the station-master said, smiling to hear her use a word almost unknown in Churchill; "there is no fly here to-night. But Sir Neil Athelston will be sending soon for these greyhounds of his, which came by your train."

"Thank you," said the girl, entering the office with a slow and spiritless step; "then I will wait."

As she sat beside the fire, a gentleman came into the room, and began to compare his watch with the clock that hung there.

"I was afraid I should miss the up-train," he remarked, pleasantly, to the station-master; "but I see it is not due yet. I am a little fast."

Though Colonel Stuart stood, to all appearance, intent upon altering his watch, he was still keenly aware of the presence of the lonely girl who sat waiting so quietly in the dingy room. He noticed—for he could not help noticing it—the delicate beauty of her face, the rare unusual beauty of a face with no color on the creamy white cheeks, no brilliance in the dark-gray eyes, no smile upon the small curved lips; but he noticed, most of all, the indescribable, almost indefinable sense of utter, quiet loneliness that seemed to surround her.

"There is generally a fly sent to meet this train," he said to her, in a kindly, pleasant voice; "but it is not here to-night, of course, because it is wanted. I shall be calling at the Leopard on my way back. May I send one round for you then?"

Lina—because he spoke so gently and so warmly to her—half turned away her face, for fear of those tears that were so near her eyes to-night, and so saw nothing of the grave and pitiful gaze he bent upon her.

"I am come to meet my sister and my little nephew," he went on. "If you are going in our direction—"

"I am going to High Athelston," replied Lina, glancing up at last.

"Oh!" said Colonel Stuart; and she detected an accent almost of pity in his gentle, genial tones. "Lady Athelston is an invalid, and rather forgetful; so you will, I'm sure, excuse her not having sent the carriage. She will be mortified when she recollects."

Lina smiled, knowing the words were intended to cheer her; and just at that moment a carriage was heard rolling up to the station-gate. A quick, authoritative voice called the station-master by name, then whistled a summons which the greyhounds were quick to answer.

Lina's breath came a little quicker. Was some one come now to take her to her new, strange home? She heard the station-master whispering when he led the dogs out, and she guessed that he was telling their master how she was waiting there to be conveyed to High Athelston. Her cheeks burned hotly when she caught the impatient answer.

"Best thing she can do, too. Send for a fly from the Leopard. What is the use of detaining me? My horses can not stand here all night. Now, Ridley, look sharp after Coquette; she is at her old tricks. Ah! Stuart, you here?"

Then the loud tones ceased, and Lina Chester knew that the gentleman who had for ten minutes been her companion was conferring with Sir Neil Athelston in a semi-whisper, as the station-master had done, and on the same subject. The answer was less impatient now, but more careless.

"Not very likely, Stuart. It's not in my line; nor can I spare Ridley to go round by the Leopard. Send a fellow from here. I'm too infernally tired to drive myself."

The sad, girlish face beside the smoldering fire grew whiter and whiter, while Colonel Stuart pleaded again. Then the answer was a little quieter, though even more selfish.

"Very well. Here, Ridley, go round to the Leopard for a cab, and make haste, man. I can not wait, so you may drive home on it. I wish to Heaven, Stuart, that the old lady would remember to give her own orders. I hope this girl has a memory long enough to serve for both."

Without a word of reply, Colonel Stuart reentered the office, and spoke quietly to Lina.

"Sir Neil Athelston's servant is gone to hasten the fly. It is too cold for you to drive three miles in a dog-cart, as Sir Neil himself is doing, with his dogs."

Lina had understood it all too well for any smile to visit her eyes or lips in answer to his, and she was glad when another train dashed into the station, and Colonel Stuart went out to meet it.

It was while she sat once more waiting alone, that the same imperative voice called to the station-master, while from a door in the booking-office—opposite that which led to the platform—a gentleman advanced and impatiently looked round him in the dimness. A tall gentleman, Lina saw he was, as he came on into the light—tall and broad-shouldered, with a Saxon face, handsome, though indolent and sensual; a thick, fair mustache; strong, blue eyes; and short, curling, light hair.

"Where the deuce *is* that fellow?" Sir Neil Athelston gave a start—a real start, though it was imperceptible to Lina—then came on easily, and stood beside the fire opposite her. A certain superficial, scornful expression, which was habitual to him, gave place to a deep intentness as he looked into the girl's face, so purely and delicately beautiful, and he raised his hat with a slow, satisfied smile.

"A dismal waiting-room," he said, and his tone, though condescending, was a little eager too.

No answer. This was Sir Neil Athelston, and Lina remembered how he had spoken of her on the platform both to the station-master and to Colonel Stuart.

"If I understand aright, I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Chester. If so, may I drive her to High Athelston?"

"No, thank you," answered Lina, feeling her loneliness most keenly at that moment. "You said that to wait for the cab was the best thing I could do."

Sir Neil laughed, but spoke still more eagerly, with his eyes fixed upon the young, white face. "You had better come, Miss Chester; do let me drive you. I did not intend you to wait in this hole."

"You are too tired to drive even yourself," Lina said, raising her eyes fully to his for the first time. "Besides, it is not in your line, you said."

"Pray pardon those stupid words of mine," said Neil Athelston, flushing hotly, and feeling awkward as he never remembered having done before; actually forgetting for that moment that he was at present the idol of many a London drawing-room, and withal the handsomest young baronet in half a dozen counties. "It is unkind of you to recall those absurd speeches of mine," he added, feeling terribly anxious now to win another glance from the beautiful, sad eyes. "I did not think that you would hear. I did not—you know I had not seen you, and so you ought not to reproach me."

"I did not reproach you," said Lina, tiredly; "but I would rather wait here until your servant comes with the cab."

By this time the train had left the station, and the passengers whom it had deposited followed Colonel Stuart into the office. These were his sister and her son, with the boy's tutor, an aristocratic, foreign-looking man of three-and-thirty, just three years younger than the bearded English soldier whose hair was thin upon his temples, and whose eyes were so deeply and gravely thoughtful.

Sir Neil Athelston turned and greeted Mrs. Esdaile; and she, glancing kindly at Lina, and evidently understanding who she was, asked him to introduce her. "As we are to be neighbors," she added, in a voice as pleasant as her brother's.

Neil went through the ceremony, his voice lazy and rather haughty, but the color mounting slowly into his face. "Mr. Jelfrey, Miss Chester," he ended, as the tutor bowed low before Lina.

Then Neil Athelston's eyes filled with a great surprise, for he had never before introduced two people who received his introduction as did these two. And yet he could not have told how this was, if he had tried. A something quite indefinable there was in the gaze of each. Was it fear, or was it only astonishment?

"Mr. Jelfrey, Miss Chester."

The words were scarcely uttered, when Lina shivered with an uncontrollable suddenness. Mr. Jelfrey had left the door open, and the chill night wind crept in. Quietly he moved from Sir Neil's side, and shut the door; then, returning, looked full into Lina's small, white face, as if questioning her in an eager, unintelligible silence.

"Miss Chester feels the place chilly," he said; and Lina slid her traveling-cloak over her hands, which were clasped rigidly together.

"I am waiting for you, Miss Chester," pleaded Sir Neil, trying to hide the real anxiety with which he spoke.

"I am waiting for the fly," she answered, calmly ignoring his words.

"And we must go too, Alick," said Mrs. Esdaile to her brother. "Are you ready?"

"Quite ready," rejoined Colonel Stuart, who for the last minute had been curiously watching Jelfrey's face. "Come, Jack, jump up to your seat."

Just as the carriage from The Anchorage left the station-yard, the hotel fly drove up, and Lina took her place. The men were putting her boxes on the roof, when Sir Neil, who had stood at the door ever since he had assisted her in, spoke suddenly to his groom.

"I say, Ridley, drive on with the greyhounds; they want looking after, and they make the dog-cart deucedly uncomfortable. I'll come on after you. Make haste."

And the next moment, easily and patronizingly, he had taken his place beside Lina.

On every subject that occurred to him he talked, through that drive in the closed fly, which, in itself, was a sore penance to him. Perhaps he wished only to amuse her, and shorten the distance for her; perhaps—and this was likely to be far nearer the truth—only to amuse himself, if he could, by drawing some few words from her quiet, beautiful lips, or making her eyes turn to his, as they had turned only once.

But all his efforts were in vain. Except cool monosyllables, or an occasional indifferent remark, Lina did not speak at all; and never once did she turn her eyes upon him from the moment the fly left the station till it stopped before the portico at High Athelston. The footmen, standing at the open door, with the rich light from the hall falling upon their powdered heads, saw, with intense and speechless astonishment, that it was their master who issued from this thoroughly-to-be-despised vehicle, and turned and offered his hand to a lady; saw, even with greater astonishment, that she passed it by without noticing it.

"Of course, the poor thing—only a companion, you know—was too confused to know what to do. She actually walked up the steps, leaving him to follow. He might well look angry and disgusted. What a little upstart she was!—pretty, though—very pretty! only wanting in color."

Thus the twin Mercuries; while Sir Neil Athelston, following the slight, quiet figure into the brilliant hall, was puzzled in his thoughts as he had not been puzzled before.

What was there about this girl which made him feel so unusually strange? Why was she not awkward and shy in this first introduction to his magnificent home? Why, she entered it with just such a quiet grace as he could fancy its young mistress—what a ridiculous thought!

"Where's my lady, Martin?" he asked, as the butler came toward them, looking quite as much a gentleman as Sir Neil himself, thought Lina, in her ignorance and bitterness.

"My lady has gone to her room, I believe, Sir Neil. She bid me tell Miss Chester that tea is served for her in the blue morning-room."

"Will you not dine, Miss Chester?" interrupted Sir Neil, eagerly.

"I would rather not," said Lina, shrinking hastily from the idea of dining with him. "I would rather not."

"She never attempts even any excuse for her avoidance of me," thought Neil, and his lips tightened rather cruelly under the handsome light mustache.

Drawing off his coat leisurely, he watched her pass on up the broad, lighted staircase, and he thought that, though so thoroughly at her ease, there was a certain shrinking in her eyes and steps, as if she avoided even *seeing* the handsome place further than she need—a certain nameless shrinking, quite apart from any shyness.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST NIGHT AT HIGH ATHELSTON.

The blue morning-room, in which Miss Chester's tea was laid, was a small luxurious apartment, rarely used by Sir Neil, but a favorite one with his mother, who preferred it, and her own boudoir and dressing-room, to the more grand and spacious rooms below. A bright fire burned in the grate, for the air of the spring night was chill; and Lina sat down before it, her heart literally crowded with sad and busy thoughts. Unutterably lonely she felt; yet there was something beyond the loneliness which was even harder to bear.

"A something which I dare not think about to-night!" she cried to herself, pushing the dark hair from her temples, and looking eagerly round the room, as if seeking some thought that should chase this one away.

"Bright, pleasant things all round me," she whispered, in a voice that strove to be glad and brave. "I will always try to think only of the bright and pleasant things that are around me."

Just as she thought that thought, there entered the cheerful-looking young maid-servant who had volunteered to assist her when she changed her traveling-dress.

"My lady will be glad to see you in her dressing-room, Miss Chester, if you'll please to come. My lady's very deaf, 'em," the girl added, evidently for the sake of hovering curiously about Lina, yet speaking with thorough respect, and no air of gossiping, "and she likes persons to speak up like when they're talking to her. Fletcher, her own maid, has a curious voice that never wants raising; it goes sharp in like without my lady's trumpet; and she hears Sir Neil nearly always, though he doesn't talk to her very much; but she's bad with strangers. If you're not very tired after your journey, 'em, it would be best just to speak up, as your voice is very—at least, it's been very quiet to me. Shall I come to your room to-night, 'em, to see if I can help you? I'll always be glad to help you, Miss Chester, though I'm only under Fletcher. Margaret my name is, so you'll always know who to send for when you want help—won't you?"

Lina thanked the girl pleasantly, even gratefully, then followed her along a wide, arched corridor, and into Lady Athelston's dressing-room.

As the maid closed the door slowly upon Lina, a lady, who sat in a lounging-chair at the fire, turned round to scrutinize her. At a glance Lina could have told that this was Sir Neil's mother; and at a glance she saw that the face which met hers was weak and uncertain, a little querulous, and a little cruel. But the helpless look which generally accompanies deafness, the mute, unconscious appeal of the attitude, won Lina's gentle sympathy in that first moment, and she advanced gratefully to take the outstretched hand,

never giving one glance to where Sir Neil, in his faultless evening dress, leaned against the low chimney-piece opposite his mother.

"Take this chair, Miss Chester," said Lady Athelston, pointing to one which had been placed beside her own. "Leave it where it is," she added, her eyes keenly fixed upon the girl; "leave it there. I want you to sit where I can see you."

And Neil, from his position opposite, seemed to think it was just as necessary that he, too, should be able to see her.

Still and quiet, Lina sat under the gaze of both mother and son; still and quiet, yet with that nameless shrinking from them of which Sir Neil was all the time half conscious, as he watched her with a steadfast intentness which made her lips shake, but brought no crimson to the delicate white skin.

"You have had a cold journey, I fear, Miss Chester," said Lady Athelston, with sleepy gentleness. "From where have you traveled today?"

"Only from London," answered Lina, speaking through the trumpet which Lady Athelston held to her ear.

"From the house where you have been living as governess?—from the lady in Berkeley Square to whom I wrote about you?"

"Yes," said Lina, but in such a strange low voice of pain, almost of fear, that Sir Neil decided promptly in his own mind that her experience of governess life had been far from rose-colored.

"Dreary life, Miss Chester, eh?" he remarked. "Wouldn't you rather teach an intelligent dog to stand on his head than a child to work a sum?"

"I never tried the 'intelligent dog,'" answered Lina, with quiet carelessness.

"I think you told me you had no home," put in Lady Athelston, unconscious this time of her son's speech.

"No; no home," the girl answered, simply.

"And no relations?"

"No, Lady Athelston."

"Fortunate child!" put in Sir Neil.

As Lina spoke, her face had flushed slowly and duskily for the first time, and not a shade of this was lost upon him.

"Then, where do you live when you have no engagement?" persisted the lady.

"I never had but one situation," said Lina, coldly, "and I left that only when I came here."

"Now, mother," put in Neil, "we are getting tired."

"You have a pretty name, Miss Chester," said Lady Athelston, readily understanding her son—as she could when he chose that she should—and taking his hint, as she always did. "Is it an abbreviation of Helena?"

"No, my lady," answered the girl, her lips stiff and proud.

"Lina Chester, eh? Was your father any relation to the celebrated barrister?"

"I believe not."

And then Neil saw that the small lips blanched suddenly, and he told himself that there was a secret held there, which it would not take him long to find out.

"You read aloud well, I understand from the answer I received to my letter to Mrs. M'Mullen, in Berkeley Square," resumed Lady Athelston, "and it will be one of your chief duties here. Others will be— Neil," she broke off, as if suddenly aware of the needlessness of her son's presence at this interview, "are you not going to have a cigar?"

"Presently, mother. A polite method of turning me out, Miss Chester; but it is a hint which I am far too obtuse to see. I never was educated to take hints. Go on with the list of duties, please," he added in a louder key; "go on, mother; I'm necessary for the supply of marginal notes." And so saying, Sir Neil seated himself coolly.

But when Lady Athelston had enumerated various requirements in a slow, tedious fashion, and he had failed to attract Lina's attention by his asides, he interrupted, laughing,

"Don't you think those are about enough for one dose? How do you like the prospect, Miss Chester? They are duties, you know, and England expects you to do them all! We can not even promise to make them pleasant to you either," he added, lazily, as he leaned forward on his low seat. "My mother and I are not pleasant people to live with. She is a little too selfish, and a great deal too much under the influence of any mischief-maker who chooses to influence her, and I am always out."

"Then you can hardly be unpleasant to live with," said Lina, coldly smiling.

"Yes, my son is generally away," said Lady Athelston, having caught something of his last remark; but, of course, Miss Chester, your duties are quite independent of him; and you will, I hope, always pursue them conscientiously."

"Quite independent of him; yes, my lady," she answered; and Neil Athelston wondered whether the quiet tone was really sarcastic or only indifferent.

Then Miss Chester rose to go, with a sudden though gentle independence, which astonished him and brought a laugh to his eyes, as he hastened to open the door for her, and held his hand to her as she passed—held it almost pleadingly.

But, without raising her own, Lina bowed, and walked slowly on to her own chamber. There for a long hour she sat quite still, with her head buried in her hands, asking her own heart many a painful and anxious question. Had it been wise to come here? Had it been even right to make her home under this roof, though only temporarily?

"The temptation was too strong," she moaned to herself; "and I did it for the best—but, oh! I despise him! I despise him; and I know I shall grow to do so more and more. I might have known it. I might have known how fiercely I should hate any one of his name. But—but I did it for the best."

And then, in the silence and solitude of this lonely midnight, the girl's overtasked strength gave way, and passionate, vehement sobs shook the slight, delicate form.

All this while Sir Neil Athelston, idly smoking, wondered why this girl should haunt him so unaccountably, and repicture herself forever in the curling, fragrant wreaths of smoke.

There was the small, rounded form; the motionless white hands; and, above all, the beautiful face, with its delicate features and pure, white skin. Nothing would chase these away—though he was very doubtful whether he wished them

chased away—and he dawdled to his room at midnight, still following one thought.

"I must play a double game, I suppose," so this one thought ran. "I hope both parts will be equally pleasant, as both parts will be equally easy."

And with a smile upon his handsome, sensual face, he passed the closed door behind which Lina knelt alone, battling with a great, unwhispered pain.

CHAPTER III.

SOWING THE BITTER SEED.

"WHY, Neil, this is a new thing. I can not remember the day when you have breakfasted with me, when we have been alone. Certainly Miss Chester and I have finished, but still it is wonderful. What has brought the change?"

"There's no act of parliament to prevent a man's changing his mind," was Neil Athelston's careless answer, as he sauntered up to the breakfast-table, giving his mother a light touch on the shoulder as his morning greeting, and offering his hand to Lina with a smile.

"You said it disagreed with you to come down before the day was thoroughly aired," resumed Lady Athelston, motioning him to the chair beside her.

"My mother just as often fancies she hears what is *not* spoken, as misses hearing what is," he explained, in a cool aside to Lina; but a slow, dusky flush rose in his face as he took his cup from her hand, loitering unnecessarily over the slight act.

"It requires a more vivid imagination than I possess to picture that," she answered, lightly.

"Is your imagination not very vivid, then?" he asked, quietly drawing his chair nearer to where she sat presiding at the head of the table. "I should have fancied it was. But, as my mother continually tells me, I am no decipherer of character. Fact is, I never have troubled myself about it. A plain face can have no charm for me, however much character it may possess; and a beautiful one needs no character beyond its beauty—to me it could possess none."

"Neil," interrupted his mother, unconscious of this speech, "do you dine at Hawkedale to-day?"

"I suppose so," he answered, coldly. Then he went on addressing gay commonplaces to Lina, his tone full of animation. But, when he saw with what utter indifference she received these speeches, he turned almost angrily away.

"Are you going to drive to-day, mother?"

"Yes. I have promised Louisa Castillain to drive to Hawkedale."

"Is Miss Chester going with you?"

"No, not this time," replied Lady Athelston, who did not like the point-blank question. "I shall leave her at liberty to examine the grounds and gardens. I dare say she will be glad of the change, after being indoors with me all the morning."

A gleam of gentle kindness, rare and very beautifying, crossed Lady Athelston's face as she spoke; and Lina smiled in gentle recognition of it.

"When shall you go?" inquired Neil, as he helped himself to a cutlet, apparently with his whole heart in the act.

"After luncheon. Now, Miss Chester, will you go and cut the flowers for my rooms? I shall like you, as a rule, to do that always before breakfast. I do not like being late in the mornings."

"Never mind with what invalidish sleepiness and idleness you spend the day afterward, if you are but early in the mornings," laughed Neil, rising to open the door for Lina. "My late breakfasts have for years been looked upon by my mother as the ruin of this house; but my hopes rise gradually, as the years go by, and the house does not fall about us in ashes."

"Neil," began his mother, as the door closed upon Lina, "I am sorry I engaged her. I think—I fear it will not be a good thing; she is too pretty."

"Too pretty!" laughed Neil, repeating the words as if he liked them. "Too pretty!—for you or for me?"

"Too pretty for her position; you know what I mean," replied Lady Athelston, in the querulous tone she always unconsciously adopted with her son, when she wished her words to be heeded. "And too delicate—too pretty for her position. Don't you see what I mean?"

"An impossibility so long as her position is here," replied Neil, with nonchalance. "Who is she, mother?" he added, abruptly, as he went on with his breakfast. "I never thought of asking the question until I saw her; now I want it answered."

"I know nothing of her save what I told you before she came," returned Lady Athelston, pettishly; "and you took no heed, and no interest, and never attempted to help me."

"Who sent her here?"

"No one. She answered my advertisement in the *Times*."

"Who gave her a character, or certificate, or passport, or whatever 'companions' call it?"

"She sent me the address of a Mrs. M'Mullen, No. 18 Berkeley Square, to whom I wrote about her. I told you all this at the time, Neil, you know," complained his mother.

"And what did she—this Irish Londoner—condescend to say of Miss Chester?" inquired Neil, sipping his cocoa.

"She said a hundred things, always speaking in the highest terms of the girl. And so I engaged her, as I told you I should, because how could I tell she was so—so pretty?" stammered Lady Athelston, almost ashamed of giving utterance to her reason.

"Impossible till you saw her," laughed Neil, "unless Mrs. Mac had told you Miss Chester was so very pretty that she had felt compelled to dismiss her. Mother," he added, stooping lower to her ear, "has she ever lived in this neighborhood before?"

"Never, that I am aware of," was the answer; "indeed, I know that she has not, because she told me, half an hour ago, that she knew nothing of Highshire."

"And yet—and yet I could have sworn that she and Jelfrey recognized each other last night, and that one or two things which I told her about ourselves were familiar to her—only a fancy, I suppose."

"What, Neil? You always aggravate me so

when you do not speak out," put in his mother, fretfully.

"I was saying, if you would just take trouble to listen," rejoined Sir Neil, with careless composure, "that Jelfrey looked as if he had seen Miss Chester before, when he was introduced last night, and that I hope you will not talk to *him* about her."

"You are always making insinuations against your mother, Neil," fretted Lady Athelston.

"I only insinuated that your nature was charmingly flexible and communicative," Sir Neil answered, with a smile that was half a sneer, as he strolled away to the conservatories to watch Lina at her task. And as he watched her, there grew once more that unusual gravity in his eyes.

"You will not want me to-day, I suppose, my lady?" asked Fletcher, with the vicious sniff which she indulged in as a vent for her ill-temper, and which would have lost her her place long ago if she had not had both a deaf mistress and a sufficient modicum of tact to choose her opportunities of indulging in the luxury of this mark of disapprobation.

"Not constantly to-day," answered her mistress, almost deprecatingly. "Miss Chester will be with me."

"I've seen her this morning," said the maid, in just that penetrating voice which her subordinate had tried to describe to Lina the night before; "I did not see her yesterday."

"Miss Chester is very pretty, isn't she, Fletcher?" inquired Lady Athelston, mildly.

"Pretty!" ejaculated the woman, with a toss of her head; "I do not know what you call pretty, then, my lady. Why, her complexion's just dough, and nothing more or less; and she's nothing but an atomy."

Whether Fletcher meant an atom or an anatomy will ever remain a mystery, since Lady Athelston did not think it worth while to inquire.

"I don't like 'companions,' sniffed Fletcher, with vicious emphasis. "There's always mischief made between mistress and maid when there's a companion in the way."

"You should not anticipate such things," said Lady Athelston, almost startled at the idea. "No mischief can be made for you by Miss Chester."

"It is very kind of you to say it, my lady," replied Fletcher, resignedly; "but she can not help it. Companions always must make things uncomfortable in a house, and it is always best to be prepared. Don't let it take you unawares, my lady," she added, with deep cunning; "don't you be tempted into trusting a stranger instead of those that have served you and honored you for years and years."

They were only a few insignificant words, spitefully uttered; but such foul seeds take root sometimes, and bear rank weeds, the growth of which may overmaster us, as they fling their poisonous tendrils round our lives.

As soon as luncheon was over that day, Lady Athelston gave Lina her liberty, and recommended her to take a long exploring walk in the park and gardens.

"We dine alone at seven," she added, "as Sir Neil will be at Hawkedale; and you are free to enjoy yourself until then."

The prospect of the walk was delightful to the girl, who craved for solitude with an intense and almost bitter craving, and she started at once. From the arched door-way on the western side of the house, she came out upon one wide graveled terrace bordered by low, massive stone walls, along which, at intervals, stood the old and beautifully cut stone figures which were among the sights of High Athelston, and between these were urns and vases, filled with flowers and rare trailing plants.

Down the broad white steps went Lina, to the second terrace, where fanciful seats were placed in the shade of the fragrant shrubs upon the slope, and from which she looked down to where, beyond the third terrace, stretched the velvet sweep of turf where archery, lawn-billiards, cricket, tennis, croquet, and every imaginable game, were established. As she reached the bottom of the third flight of steps, Lina came upon Sir Neil Athelston leaning against the figure of Ajax, which stood huge and high upon the balustrade above the lowest step. Her bright anticipation of enjoyment vanished in an instant when he turned, rapidly and eagerly, at the sound of her step, and made it evident that he had been waiting and listening for it.

"Which way are you going, Miss Chester? Along the terrace to the gardens, or on here into the park? We have grottoes, and caverns, and fountains, and all kinds of things to show you, if you are interested in them."

"I am not going any farther than this," said Lina, so simply and naturally that he began to wonder in himself whether the girl had any deficiency of common sense.

"Not going any farther!" he echoed. "Why, you have the whole of the afternoon at your disposal. The old lady is safe until dinner-time. She will not on any consideration forego her afternoon tea and gossip with Miss Castillain—a rare plant, Louisa Castillain; a bitter herb which would have rejoiced the heart of any witch a hundred years ago. So—so come, Miss Chester," he added, in his tone of lazy patronage, "I have a hundred things I should like to show you."

"What is that tower on the rising ground?" asked Lina.

Not choosing to walk on, but too proud to make any resistance, she waited a minute, speaking in an easy tone, as she leaned against the statue of Ulysses which stood opposite to that of Ajax, guarding the lowest step of the lowest terrace.

"Merely a summer-house, which one of my idle forefathers built to smoke in," Neil answered, looking across at her without attempting to follow the direction of her glance. "There is what you girls call a nice view from there. Come and see."

"And that path through the shrubbery, and among the trees, and past the wooden bridge—to what does that lead?" continued Lina, not in the slightest moved by his words.

"That leads merely out of the park by one of the back entrances. You see that line of firs and limes, where the rooks are holding a parliament now, and discussing woman's suffrage? Well, there is a door among those trees which leads from the park into Nether Lane, and this path leads to it. Would you like to come and see?—though it is by no means the prettiest way."

"It is a very beautiful park," said Lina, cool-

ly; "but the hills above the firs there are more beautiful."

"Now, Miss Chester," laughed Sir Neil, "that is said in pure perverseness. This park—though I say it that should not—possesses every thing that can make a park beautiful. Own that you spoke in pure perverseness."

"The hills are very beautiful," said Lina, nervously; "but when I spoke I was thinking of something else."

"Not of the park's possessor, I fear?" asked Neil, with laughing arrogance.

"Not of the park's present possessor," replied Lina, in a rapid tone, and with an unnatural brightness and restlessness in her eyes.

"The park's old possessors," rejoined Sir Neil, evidently only desiring to keep her there, "are not worth thinking about. The Athelstons have been a race of handsome scoundrels ever since they have been a race at all. Do not go in—please do not go in, Miss Chester. I was bored to death until you came out; and it has been so pleasant since."

But Lina went on up the steps, only answering his words by a light and careless smile.

"Come to the grotto, Miss Chester," he continued, eagerly, as he turned and walked beside her. "Come to the conservatories—anywhere; or let us play croquet."

But, even in all his eagerness, Sir Neil could not help a laugh after he had proposed this.

"That temptation had something ludicrous in the sound of it," he said; "yet I have seen two people play croquet often, with all their hearts and souls. Why should the proposal concerning you and me have tickled me so irresistibly?"

"The idea *was* ludicrous," she answered, simply.

"Please do not be so scornful. I can play," he said, the laugh still in his eyes, as he sought one in hers. "I do not like the game generally, and I hate it at times; but I can hit a ball when I wish. Will you try me?"

"I have never played croquet in my life."

"Have you not? Then you will let me teach you?" entreated Neil, quite serious again. "I shall be so happy; and you must understand it, because we Highshire folks are strong in croquet. We think existence incomplete without our croquet-club, which is bound to give a handsome wedding present to any couple who owe their marriage to it. Queer, isn't it? But it makes the affair a little less diluted. It is such a grand idea for a lady to have to spend her pocket-money in buying a wedding present for her rival, as well as having had to witness the match made up. I hate croquet as an institution; but as a medium for all kinds of flirtations, spite, and jealousy, I think it is the finest invention of the age. Don't you?"

"I have not yet seen the playing of the Highshire Club," returned Lina, in a quiet tone which made Neil laugh heartily.

"Archery is another notable diversion among us," he said; "and our prominent feature is the ease and complacency with which we shoot wide of the mark. You do not shoot, of course?"

"No," answered Lina, as they slowly reached the top of the last flight of wide, low steps.

"I thought not. Leave stronger hands than yours to pull the bow-string."

And as Sir Neil spoke, he put out his right hand, and with a sudden gesture—rapid, though very gentle—touched the slight white fingers which held her dress.

A vivid tide of crimson darted across the girl's pale face, fading as instantly as it spread; then, with twitching lips and a passionate brilliance in her eyes, she passed him with fleet steps and entered the house.

"It is not natural," muttered Neil, angrily, "and I do not understand it. If I were some kind of old philosopher, I should say I had offended her in another world. It just seems as if she had some mad reason for her incomprehensible behavior. That is impossible, of course; but perhaps I had better not have gone quite so far just yet."

As Sir Neil Athelston sauntered round the terrace, feeling unusually ill at ease, Mr. Jelfrey came up the avenue and joined him. He made no direct remark upon the defeat which he read in the young baronet's face—Eustace Jelfrey's tact was too keen for that—but, by slow degrees, and skillfully disguised questioning, he drew from him at last a confession of his admiration for Lina Chester.

"She *is* very pretty," ruminated the tutor, as if the idea had just struck him.

"She is far more than that," interrupted Sir Neil, hotly; "she is very beautiful. I should have thought you would have been as much entranced as I was last night."

"My dear Sir Neil," answered Jelfrey, airily, "such luxuries as are within your reach are totally impossible to me. You may talk of, and encourage, your admiration for the beautiful; I must curb and conquer mine."

"Poor Jelfrey!" laughed Sir Neil, though the blood coursed a little quicker in his veins; "yet I am almost tempted to believe you, for you did not exhibit one sign of admiration when you were introduced to Miss Chester last night."

"Because a face strikes you as irresistible, Sir Neil, must it necessarily strike every one else so?"

"Yes—such a face as that. It is one whose beauty is unquestionable; about which there can be no shade of doubt; not like some, of which you may hear a hundred different opinions."

"As Miss Castillain's, for instance," put in Mr. Jelfrey, smiling.

"Miss Castillain's!" sneered Sir Neil. "I thought every one agreed in calling *her* handsome. Why, man, every feature she possesses is as clearly cut as if she had been the prize model among statues of prigs."

"I hardly know how they would be cut under the circumstances," replied Jelfrey, with a slow, sinister smile; "but, when I spoke, I referred to Miss Marjorie Castillain."

"Oh!" rejoined the baronet, carelessly.

An odd look passed over the tutor's face, half triumphant, half scornful.

"Who would imagine, Sir Neil," he said, "that you appreciate your unrivaled advantages? Who would believe that you felt yourself engaged to the richest girl in the county—at least, the one who will be the richest—and living under the same roof with the most beautiful; and—luckiest of all—that you knew you had power to charm both?"

"I do *not* know it," returned Neil, moodily.

"I do," put in Jelfrey, while he keenly watch-

ed his companion's face; "one part is undoubtedly done already; the other nearly so, I presume."

And then Sir Neil, taken unawares, and led on by Jelfrey's quiet interest and attention, was won to tell him how openly Lina avoided him.

"Shy," decided Jelfrey, promptly. "I saw it in her face last night. But *that* will surely not discourage you, Sir Neil? Why, such a girl as that is just the one to like you all the better for a dauntless persistency. She will hardly notice it herself, but, unconsciously, your courtesy will grow pleasant to her, then necessary."

"I do not fancy it," Neil answered, thoughtfully. "I never saw a girl who could be so entirely and quietly independent, yet be so small and gentle and lovable. By-the-way, Jelfrey," he added, suddenly turning to look into his companion's face, "did you ever see Miss Chester before last night?"

"I!—I see her before? Never!" exclaimed Eustace, uttering the glib lie very hurriedly.

"I beg your pardon, then. It was a stupid suspicion of mine."

"And can you really be discouraged, Sir Neil," asked the tutor, as if glad to leave that subject, "and let the shy diffidence of a girl—childish, misdirected pride perhaps, or, more likely still, a disguise for other feelings—chill you in trying to amuse yourself in her society until you go back to town? From what you have told me of Miss Chester, I take her to be just one to be readily moved by constant attention from such as you; and if she is not, I think I can help you."

"How?" questioned Sir Neil, quickly.

"I can do it," Jelfrey answered, slowly, "but I will not interfere unless you require my help; and you need not require it unless you choose. I am an older man than yourself, Sir Neil, by half a score of years at least, and after a large experience—which I have gained by knocking about the world as few men have done—I give you one piece of advice for winning this girl's admiration; persist steadily in showing your admiration for *her*. Now I must go. I was anxious to see Lady Athelston, but, as she is out, I will not stay. Perhaps I may meet her."

Eustace Jelfrey walked back down the avenue, and Neil sauntered round the house, until he was fain to give up the hope of Lina's coming out again; then he ordered his horse and cantered out into the road, his thoughts retaking their old self-complacency, and shaping themselves almost as they had done the night before.

"Yes, mine will decidedly be a double game. Odd that the resistance seems, after all, as if it were going to make the one part only all the more attractive, and that, where there is most to win, the part should be so easy. Well, my experience in women is pretty wide, and I generally find their smiles ready enough."

CHAPTER IV.

MARJORIE.

"For me, Martin? Was the card sent to me?"

The corpulent, middle-aged butler at High Athelston, who had made an unusual exertion for Lina, told her that Miss Castillain's card had been especially sent to Miss Chester; and then, hoping she fully appreciated the compliment he had paid her by bringing it himself, backed slowly from Lady Athelston's boudoir, where the girl sat arranging countless and many-colored diamonds of satin for the cushions which Lady Athelston delighted to make.

"*Marjorie Castillain.*"

Lina read the words on the card as she rose. "Some message for Lady Athelston, I suppose, which she will not trust to a servant. But I wonder she even knew my name."

And as Lina said it, walking slowly down the wide stairs, a flush spread over the delicate face to which the pallor was so much more natural than the bloom.

As she entered the first drawing-room, a lady came forward from one of the windows, with her hand outstretched. There was something in the first meeting of these two girls which made them feel that it was not quite an ordinary meeting, though neither understood what this something was. Each was anxious to read the nature of the other, yet there was no curiosity, no inquisitiveness. On the one side there was frankness, yet no patronage; on the other, a shrinking silence that was not timidity; on the one, a gay lightness, yet no flippancy; on the other, an earnestness that was almost sad. As for the faces, and what was written there, they were read at once.

Miss Castillain's great eyes took in Lina's nature at a glance; and Lina knew in after-years that her first impression of Marjorie Castillain had been true and exact. The two, without being widely different, were an artistic contrast to each other. Marjorie Castillain was not a beautiful girl, yet there was a wonderful grace in her tall and lissom figure; a power almost beyond beauty in her bright, restless face; a power quite beyond beauty in her character, contradictory as it was; fearless though gentle, thoughtful yet gay, earnest and sincere, beyond all words, where she once set her heart to love or to aid; humble and grateful for any love or care that might be given her; yet rebellious and defiant enough at times to try all love to the uttermost. This was Marjorie, with all her contradictions; disclosing in her face, as she stood there in the April sunshine which brightened the long luxurious room, a specimen of girl-nature such as one rarely meets—not on account of the rarity of any one of its qualities, but on account of the rarity of finding them together.

"When a strange family settles in this neighborhood, Miss Chester, all the surrounding families make a point of calling," she began, with characteristic frankness; "so when a strange lady comes, I feel it to be the duty of other ladies to do the same. And here I am—such an old friend of Lady Athelston's and Sir Neil's that you must let me be your friend too."

"You are very good," began Lina, feeling the tears starting, more at the bright, gentle kindness of Miss Castillain's eyes than at her friendly words.

"Good!" she echoed, laughing. "Do not say that until you know me."

"I will say it again, then," answered Lina, gently.

"Never. Nobody ever says it who knows me.

I do not say I am not good—I have a private opinion of my own that I am so, only not appreciated. My own sister, for instance, whenever there is any thing to say against me, she does say it with such a relish. But you will soon find that out when you know her. Her name is Louisa—an ugly name, isn't it?"

"I do not like it very much," modified Lina, as an answer was expected.

"No, of course not. Still it has the advantage of being a name you occasionally hear; while mine—ugh! Marjorie! Don't you picture an old nurse in a mob-cap? What an insult it was to my future prospects when, in my incapacity, they gave me the name of an old dame Castillain who lived two hundred years ago. It would not have mattered if they could have given me her beauty too; but to give me the name without it! Cruel, wasn't it, Miss Chester?"

"I think it depends on what she was like," smiled Lina.

"I did always long for beauty," replied Marjorie, her eyes very bright and earnest as she looked into her companion's lovely face; "but I am outgrowing those envious fancies now. I ought to, ought I not, as I approach the awful shadow that hovers about the age of one-score and ten, much more terrible to a woman than the three-score and ten."

"I shall be thirty in three years," said Lina, simply.

"*Shall* you!" echoed Marjorie, her eyes full of astonishment as they rested upon the small, girlish figure. "But you should not put it so; you should say you are 'more than twenty.' Every age is beautiful for a beautiful woman."

"Still, it is very near thirty," smiled Lina, wondering at the earnestness in Miss Castillain's voice.

"I am as near your age as possible, Miss Chester," she said, forbearing to tell her age—which was three years younger—as many girls would have done if they had been three years older; "and I do not think it so awful now as I did before I came. There, I said 'awful' again, didn't I? I have got into a way of using slang words, which makes papa get furious—but, then, it does not take very much to make him furious with me—and Louisa suffers terrible mental spasms. Have you heard about my father, Miss Chester?"

"No," answered Lina, a little surprised.

"Haven't you? Well, you soon will. He's odder than you can imagine, unless you are extraordinarily gifted in the imagination line. He is a caution!—oh! Miss Chester, I really did not mean to say it; it pops out in spite of me. At first I used to say these words just to provoke the old folks at home—that means my father and Louisa—but, somehow, now they seem to have got the mastery over me, and crop up continually. But now I want to tell you as much as I can of Churchill lore while I am here. You have passed through the prim, old-fashioned town. You might be inclined to think it insignificant after London, but you would be woefully mistaken, I can assure you. It has legends which rival those of Winchester and Canterbury; and it is historical, too. Why, years and years ago, the queen came here as Princess Victoria. And not only that, but when the mayor had read an address from her loyal subjects, etc., and she congratulated him and them on their picturesque town, saying, 'Yours is a very old town, Mr. Mayor,' the mayor (mayors are obliged to be self-possessed in the presence of royalty, and well-informed as the mouth-piece of the people) answered, quite readily, 'Yes, *ma'am*, it has *ever been* considered so.' Why laugh, Miss Chester, at what I think a solemn retrospect? Could you believe that my father heard it, and knew Mr. Mayor, and lived? But my father would live through any thing, I do believe. He is an extraordinary and unusual man, you see, and I am naturally proud of him. It is not every girl, is it, Miss Chester," Marjorie asked, in her fresh, young, happy voice, "whose father is an inveterate, mean, successful miser?"

"I hope not."

"You hope not? That must be because you know so little of the subject. Just think what a splendid thing it is to die worth twice as much as you were worth when you came of age! Think what a radiance the circumstance casts around a dying bed! You have heard of the man who 'lived a poor man lest a poor he died?' Well, my father is just such a lunatic. Pleasant and unselfish, isn't it, when he lives with others, and must die alone?"

"But if he saves for others?" questioned Lina.

"Whoever he saves it for, it is a selfish and narrow idea," replied Marjorie, resolutely; "but though I tell him so, he never improves under my teaching. Now, what do you think happened, even within my memory? He was coming home up the park one day, in just the miserly, shabby clothes he wears about his place, when he met an old beggar-man coming down from the house. This beggar, of course, thought he recognized a fellow-creature in similarly extreme penury, and advised him, with a knowing wink—that is another word I ought not to use—to make haste up, because a young lady was about who had given him sixpence, and that, if the old governor had been there, he would have had him turned off the grounds. My honored parent saw the mistake, and encouraged it. 'Are you sure you did get a sixpence?' he said. 'Show it up.' The man exhibited it in his dirty palm, and the squire—his great-great-grandfather once sold all his plate and jewels, and laid a purse of forty thousand pounds in the lap of his hunted and impoverished queen!—took the coin out of the dirty hand, pocketed it coolly, and went chuckling up to the house, telling the man that the old governor *would* have him turned off the grounds. Then he came straight in and scolded me for an hour. Oh, I felt so benevolent after that! I could not tell you what good deeds I was perpetually performing while the influence was upon me. Do you feel as if you knew a little of my respected parent's peculiarities now, Miss Chester? If you happen to come up to the manor some day, and see an old man felling trees, you may be pretty sure that that is the squire. I have known people accost him at his work, and ask if Mr. Castillain were up at the house. He saves a man's wages by this, you know, and that is a consideration. By these and other means he has succeeded in amassing an immense fortune for each of his daughters. I shall have a little more than Louisa, because my godfather left me two or three thousand pounds last year; but that seems to make very little difference when we each inherit

about seven thousand a year. So we can not be jealous of each other, can we? Oh no, we never are. When I hear Louisa's beauty praised, I only sigh, and say I wish it were more than skin-deep; and when she hears me rebuked, she only sighs too, and says, 'Poor Marjorie! it is a pity she can not be like other young ladies.' I hope you have not an elder sister, Miss Chester; and I not only hope it for your sake, but for hers too," added Marjorie, with a comic seriousness, as she gazed at the lovely face opposite her.

"No, I have no sister; but I have always thought it a misfortune instead of a matter of congratulation."

"Well, let me advise you from henceforth to rejoice about it," returned Marjorie, concisely, "for I have had wide experience, and I say that elder sisters are a mistake of nature. Oh, I shall be awfully glad when Louisa marries! Why are you smiling? I said 'awfully,' did I? What a bore! I meant exceedingly glad. I suppose —of course" (Miss Castillain faltered a little, but not nervously, for her eyes were full of fun), "Lady Athelston has told you that I am engaged to Sir Neil, has she?"

The question was asked so debonnairly that—being what it was—it took Lina by surprise, and she could not help showing this. Marjorie laughed merrily.

"Didn't she? I wonder at that, because she generally takes the very earliest opportunity of telling the little fact to every one whom it doesn't in the least concern, just as if she were preparing a mass of witnesses for a possible breach-of-promise case. Yes, I have been engaged to Sir Neil for — how long?—three years at least; and I don't know *why*, any more to-day than I did on the day he proposed to me. Very handsome he looked, I remember, and very chilly it was in the autumn woods. But we did promise to love each other, and that sort of thing. I think we considered it rather a jolly arrangement—I beg your pardon, I mean rather an amicable sort of arrangement. As we had so long been badgered into it—I mean teased into it—I suppose we thought it best to get it done, and so we did it. Still, there was romance in the matter, too. I don't know whether there wasn't more romance than there is in the generality of cases; indeed, I am inclined to feel sure there was. Neil was so very nice, and looked so — so like a baronet with a rent-roll of ten thousand a year, and the lion of the last season; and I was so very much obliged to him, because I wasn't the belle of any season, and never shall inherit in my own right a magnificent place like High Athelston. I was mildly pleased and grateful; and so you have no idea what a satisfactory and romantic matter it was altogether, and how the nation rejoiced over it — I mean the county. Can you fancy it? The mothers of the penniless daughters, who had been absurd enough to fancy that Sir Neil Athelston had enough without my paltry seven thousand a year, and the penniless bachelors who had fancied that that paltry seven thousand might help them to bear the expense of matrimony! Can you fancy it?"

"Not at all," said Lina, merrily.

"Some day," continued Marjorie, "I really must show you the spot where 'the low-breathed vow was uttered.' I forgot whether it was low-breathed, but, at any rate, it was a vow, and I suppose we are bound to keep it 'till death us do part:' I didn't mean to say that; I hate using those words too familiarly. That was three years ago. Neil must have been quite young—what age?"

"I could calculate better if I knew what age he is now," said Lina.

"He is twenty-five this summer."

"Two years younger than myself," put in Lina, almost unconsciously.

"Yes, he was born with the June roses—I like to express myself poetically whenever an opportunity occurs. Then he must have been twenty-two when he did it. How young to plight his troth for good and all! How young to have discovered the advantages of marrying one of Squire Castillain's daughters! But, after all," continued Marjorie, with comic gravity, "my greatest surprise is how he could have had, at that age, sufficient discernment to choose me, and steer clear of the acid mixture with which a marriage with my esteemed sister would have filled his cup of happiness! Let me see, did I like or dislike him most on that romantic day I am telling you of?"

"Oh, Miss Castillain!" cried Lina, really shocked.

"I forget," decided Marjorie, evidently intensely amused by Lina's surprise. "I can only remember thinking how well he walked over the ugly dead leaves, and that walking beside him there was rather a pleasant sensation — only cold."

"But now?"

"Oh, now—whatever it may have been then —I dislike him a good deal."

"Oh, Miss Castillain—and engaged to him!"

"And engaged to him—yes, Miss Chester," she answered. "Were you going to observe that such engagements are desecrations of our most beautiful law? I know it, and am sure it ought to be written in our prayer-books — in larger letters than that 'a man may not marry his grandmother'—that 'a man may not marry the woman he does not love.' Don't you think so?"

"I hope there are few such engagements, Miss Castillain," said Lina, seriously.

"Do you?" inquired Marjorie, with a curious questioning in her eyes. "And I know there are many — more, at any rate, than you and I can dream of in our philosophy. There is something very amusing about every thing connected with our approaching marriage," she continued, laughing. "It is one of the few things from which I can glean a joke or two in spite of papa and Louisa. It is fun to know that it is so widely published that I can never have the opportunity of refusing any other suitor; and it is fun to know that Lady Athelston is in a mildly chronic state of dread lest it should not come off! Poor, dear old lady! I wish I thought it would make her less deaf for her son to have a wife he can not manage, or that it would shed roses under her lazy feet! Poor old lady! I can not help saying it, though I do really like her very well, and am sorry for her too—just as I should be sorry to see a substantial branch of ivy, with years and years of life in it, obstinately determined to cling to a hop-pole."

"Does that represent Sir Neil?" asked Lina, smiling.

"No; the hop-pole has a wider significance. Lady Athelston *must* cling to some one; so, though her son will not act the oak which is needed, she still clings to him, varying the performance by attaching herself to that Gorgon of a maid of hers, or to Louisa, who is sufficiently gifted to pour a constant stream of scandal into that blessed trumpet—I mean, that trumpet—and most especially of all to Mr. Jelfrey, from The Anchorage, who is more gifted still, in a hundred ways. He is a clever fellow, though, really, and wants—wants one of Mr. Castillain's daughters for his wife."

"Which one?" asked Lina, laughing at Marjorie's method of putting the case.

"Well, it does not, perhaps, signify *much*, because their wealth is so nearly equal. He would like, at any rate, to have the two strings ready drawn on his bow, so that when one snaps, there is the other all ready. Don't you admire his infinite tact?"

"If it is tact," said Lina, quietly.

"Such tact I consider sufficient to place him on the highest pinnacle of greatness in these days. But I can never give you half an idea how exquisitely clever Mr. Jelfrey is. I can only hope the knowledge will gradually dawn upon you. It would take years to gauge the depth and the height and the width of his intellect. He is certainly only a tutor, but—joking aside—he is wonderfully more than that too; and then he is undeniably handsome; and it is not always that one can meet a very handsome and very gentlemanly and very clever man, eh?"

"But you dislike him?" inquired Lina, gazing eagerly, almost entreatingly, into Marjorie's face.

"No," Marjorie answered, readily, "I do not; I hate him. I have often said I hate Neil too; but I am not sure about that, though they are friends. 'Show me a man's friends'—do you remember?—'and I will tell you what the man himself is.' There is something, though, in Neil's nature which makes me think that he might be better; just the same thing, however, *may* prove that he might be worse. I have never yet seen any better part dominant, and I have often seen the worse; so I am only getting deeper and deeper into the Slough of Dislike. How do *you* like him?"

The question was asked so suddenly that Lina's answer sounded chill and deliberate after it.

"Do not ask me, please. Sir Neil Athelston and I are such utter strangers."

"You will not be utter strangers for long, Miss Chester," Marjorie said, wondering a little at the proudness of the reply. "It does not take long to sound the depths of such a nature as Sir Neil Athelston's, *I* think; at any rate, as far as I have been able yet to judge."

"I should fancy you could judge best of all, Miss Castillain."

"I do not know; I am not sure, but I fancy *you* may know him before I do."

She spoke quite gravely, though the speech meant nothing but a random surmise. But so unnaturally pained and proud Lina's face grew at the few words, that Miss Castillain bitterly regretted them.

"We talk of our wedding sometimes," resumed Marjorie, in her own light tones again, "and we try to be so anxious over it, and fail so beautifully. I choose Africa for our wedding-tour, because other married couples don't go there, and because Neil likes to do what the Grundies do. I rarely begin the subject, though. Do you know why?"

"I can guess," smiled Lina.

"Can you? That's right; because I am not going to tell you—till I have told Neil himself. Oh, if my father thought there was any hitch—I hope that is not slang—in our prospects, he would lock me up for a year at least; and Louisa would tell the world in a bewailing tone, and be supremely happy. Miss Chester, haven't I cause to love, honor, etc., my father, who never utters a loving word to me from morning to night, and only remembers my existence just as an agent in this marriage; while he knows the Athelstons are a selfish, dissipated, unprincipled race? I do not think there ever will be a good and upright master here until the old name dies out; and there does not seem much prospect of that, does there, when you look at the stalwart figure of the present baronet?"

"There may be an Athelston, even yet, who will redeem all," said Lina Chester, with a grave, inexplicable sadness.

"There may; but it does not seem very likely, now that they have borne the same reputation for centuries. Neil knows it; indeed, he rather boasts of it, and says they have gradually got worse up to the present representative. Oh, I doubly hate him when he says such things! The last baronet but one was awfully wild—I mean was very wild. He married a beauty, the heiress of a cotton prince. You can see still that Lady Athelston has been a beauty. He died only a few weeks after his marriage, of typhus fever, on his wedding-tour. Can't you fancy what an incapable nurse his wife was? Serve him right! In a year's time the next baronet (that one's cousin) married her. He was a reckless, dissipated fellow, and, they say, hastened his own death; but he lived until his only son (Neil) came of age, and he educated him on his own model."

"Was the last baronet—I mean the last but one—at all like the present one in appearance?" asked Lina, rather earnestly.

"Like Neil? Oh dear, no; quite a contrast in appearance, as you may see by the portraits of him here; there are plenty of them, aren't there? He was handsome enough, high-bred, and distinguished-looking in the extreme; but he was, for all that, no credit to any family. He stood out as unprincipled, even among the unprincipled Athelstons. He was just one of those cool, persuasive men, in whose power it lies to work more than the average share of wrong, and to be unsuspected of it."

"I thought so," answered Lina, unconsciously.

"Yes, I dare say you have heard of him. Neil's father was a random, hare-brained, selfish fellow, bent on his own aims and pleasures—just as Sir Gerard was—but openly and avowedly so, like Neil; and the wrong he did, every body knew he did. Do you understand this difference?"

"Thoroughly."

"And now I have told you enough of them, haven't I? Let us dismiss them with your hope that there may some day be a worthy Athelston of High Athelston. Unlikely as it seems, we may as well indulge ourselves in the notion of

the possibility. Whom else shall I tell you of? Mr. Jorden, the rector, with his large head, and his large heart, and his large wife, and his small daughter? And I say no wonder his head is large, when it is crammed with all the confessions of his flock; and no wonder his heart is large, when it holds comfort for every body; and no wonder his wife is large, when she does nothing all day; and no wonder his daughter is small, when she has been brought up as a tiny precious pearl of inestimable value, which, if lost sight of by the parents, would be immediately swallowed up by the great gaping dragon of a world that lies beyond Churchill. She is not a bad little creature, only you will know of what sort, when I tell you she writes little three-cornered notes about nothing, and signs them always 'Emmie J.' If I could just live to see one of her letters uncrossed, and signed 'E. Jorden,' I should have some hope of her. Another thing is, that she thinks all women are made to be smiled at and petted, like kittens, and that all men delight in doing the smiling and petting part. I often wonder whether her notions, or mine, are nearer the truth."

"Hers may be true as regards some women and some men," laughed Lina.

"Yes, I suppose so; and I hope mine are true as regards other women and other men. Miss Jorden is the type of the weak-minded girls of Highshire, as my sister Louisa is the type of the strong-minded. Ugh! no wonder men are to be found who think scorn of either extreme. But, *àpropos* of Miss Jorden, she is setting her cap now—with all its bows flying—at Mr. Jelfrey. It used to be at Sir Neil, but she got tired. Not that I blame her for setting her cap at any one," broke off Marjorie, flushing a little in her laughter, "we all do it, of course. It is an exclusive woman's right."

"Do you, Miss Castillain?" inquired Lina, gently laughing.

"I? Indeed I do. My cap is almost worn out now from its frequent setting; and you should see Louisa's!"

"But you have not told me yet about Colonel Stuart and The Anchorage," put in Lina, when she was grave again.

"Oh, I can not tell you about him because—because I never know how to describe him. He is—bald."

"*Very* little," said Lina, wondering at the new, restless earnestness she detected in her visitor's tone. "I have seen him."

"Have you? Do you like his face?"

"Very much."

"You could hardly help it, could you? But," added Marjorie, with a sudden, careless merriment, "he *is* bald, you see; or, as little Jack Esdaile said, when he came from abroad, and saw his uncle, 'He has another forehead on the top of his head.'"

"I do not think I noticed it," said Lina, laughing.

"Didn't you? Why, one part of his head shines just like a mirror; and the other day when I saw a speck settled there in bold relief, I had to go away, for fear of being too strongly tempted to dust the glistening surface for him."

"Oh, hush!" cried Lina.

"It is odd that so many men grow bald quite young, isn't it?" resumed Marjorie, demurely. "Do women grow bald too, and hide it with caps and chignons? or haven't they enough brain to work its way through? Well, it is a happy thing for me that Neil Athelston is not at all likely to lose any of his hair till he is about ninety. Colonel Stuart's story is rather a romance, Miss Chester. Shall I tell it you? His sister married the only son of a man supposed to be the richest merchant in London, but who died insolvent. And because, before this, Colonel Stuart had heard—or found out, or guessed, or something—that Captain Esdaile's only sister, a delicate, gentle girl of seventeen, was—was—what shall I say?—fond of him—loved him (not as Miss Jorden loves Eustace Jelfrey, but as Viola loved the Duke of Illyria), he came forward (now that her father was dead and her brother going back to Australia, and she penniless), and married her, and brought her here, to be as happy as the day was long at The Anchorage. Poor little thing! In the midst of all her happiness, she died before they had been married quite a year. Are you tired, Miss Chester!—you look so very white."

"Only as I always do," answered Lina, simply; but she drew her hand across her forehead, with a kind of weary bewilderment.

"Soon after that," went on Marjorie, "Mrs. Esdaile and her little boy came to England, and they have lived with Colonel Stuart ever since. Captain Esdaile is working in the diamond fields now, but I hope he will be able to come back soon. They say he has always been a stern, hard man; but I call him just and upright. I believe he was terribly hard on some man who forged his father's name when they were rich; still I do not judge by that, because sin deserves its punishment. But all this only tires you; and you look as if you had grown terribly tired of me during the last few minutes. So those are all at The Anchorage, except the tutor with whom Miss Jorden is smitten; that isn't slang, and I don't feel compunction at telling her secret. When she herself doesn't keep it, what respect can I have for it?"

"Then Colonel Stuart was a widower within a year of his marriage-day?" asked Lina.

"Yes. Wouldn't it be awful to marry a widower? One would always be mentally compared, disadvantageously, with the first wife; because of course all the bad qualities of a wife are forgotten after she is dead. I wouldn't be any child's step-mother, or any man's step-wife."

"Colonel Stuart has no child, has he?" asked Lina, laughing.

"No," returned Marjorie, the reply rather hurried. "But I did not say I was thinking then of Colonel Stuart. It is a terrible fact to think how safely he has cast anchor as an old bachelor-widower. I was merely rehearsing my determination never to be any one's second love."

"Girls often make those determinations, and act exactly in opposition," remarked Lina.

"Not girls like me. Now, I will tell you Colonel Stuart's latest freak. He has brought an artist—not at all a first (but rather a fifth) rate artist—down here to take some sketches for illustrating a book Colonel Stuart's father wrote about Highshire. He found him out by buying a sketch that was for sale; for no one told of, or recommended, him. This artist has one of the cottages in Nether Lane, and he lives there in such a queer huggery-muggery way (I hope that's a real word).

The oddest thing is that, though of course he is getting a good deal of money—at least, I suppose Colonel Stuart would give him a respectable sum—he still lives as if he were as poor as he could be. His name is Spendir; but you must understand how he lives, and how rarely he makes a purchase, before you can fully appreciate the dainty irony of the name. Fitz Spendir—isn't it an odd name altogether? He, too, is a widower, I presume (not that any one in Highshire knows or cares about it), for he has a little boy who calls him father; a boy quite as old as Jack Esdaile, so that the father must have been tremendously young—I mean very young—when he married, for he can not be above thirty now. There are only two cottages in Nether Lane, side by side," Marjorie continued, lightly, "and they are such a contrast now. The woman who lives in one is a widow, though a perfect old maid for neatness and primness and acidity. Poor thing! she has had a cloud upon her way for years, and I do not mean to complain of her. Her home is a picture of order, and contains more of every thing than she can possibly need through her life-time; whereas Mr. Spendir's is bare and bleak and desolate, containing only just meagre necessaries; but to make up, there are book-shelves and pictures and chiffoniers, and things actually *painted* on the walls, to represent real furniture. I rather like the idea—don't you? A queer life they seem to live there, the father and son, with no womankind to look after them, no one to do any thing for either of them but the other."

"Perhaps their neighbor helps them," suggested Lina.

"Mrs. Cheere helps them!" echoed Marjorie, laughing. "Why, they wage perpetual guerrilla warfare! She considers it an insult that they were allowed to have the cottage next to hers, and she scolds at them—she would not condescend even to scold *to* them—at every opportunity. I take a great interest in them, Miss Chester," added Marjorie, rather gravely; "and I long to know how they manage, and if they are very wretched."

"Do they look so?" questioned Lina.

"No, I think not. Of course the house looks very odd and comfortless; but the artist is not peculiar at all, and the boy, though a rather strong contrast to bright little petted Jack Esdaile, is not more odd than many other boys about Churchill. I got Colonel Stuart to take me, and introduce me, and show me the pictures, because I inherit my mother's curiosity—Eve's, of course, I mean—and I remember how chilly the room felt when the mystery of its furniture was laid bare. Yet I have a more vivid remembrance of it than of many handsome rooms. There was a rather barren tea-table, a hungry boy, a great gray cat, and a restless, satirical, bearded man. By-the-way, would you like to go, Miss Chester, and see these sketches, which we all are expected to be interested in?"

"Very much," assented Lina.

"Then let me take you. But I forgot to tell you that Mr. Spendir sings beautifully—he certainly doesn't paint beautifully, so do not think him a paragon; I have not only heard of it, but I have really heard him. I was told one night that Mrs. Cheere—the woman who lives next door—was ill, so I went to see her. While I was there, I heard a man's voice singing in a kind of lazy, desultory way, as if the man himself were very busy—you know that sort of singing. I listened at once, eager to hear. Oh, it *was* singing! And what do you think it was?—Mendelssohn's 'If with all your hearts;' and—and—" Miss Castillain stammered a little, as she wondered whether it was fancy which had brought that strange, still look of pain into Lina's eyes—"and of course you would have thought then that he was goody, or classical, or something of that kind; but I had no sooner left Dorcas's cottage, on purpose that I might linger outside and hear more, than he went straight off into 'Somebody's courting somebody.' Colonel Stuart came up just then, and we stopped together to hear. I was not disappointed in the change of air," added the girl, laughing, "because that last was such a pleasant assurance, wasn't it?"

"Why?" asked Lina, absently.

"Why? I should have thought, being a woman, you would have seen the consolation of it. If nobody was courting any body, the world would be so very neutrally tinted; don't you think so? The finished way in which he sung even that was rare," added Marjorie, watching intently the wistful expression on Lina's face, "particularly rare in these parts. But how long I am staying! You will go with me there, and to other places, I hope. I should like you to give me as much of your time as you can, and will. It will be but little, I know, as Lady Athelston is very exacting with every one on whom she is dependent."

"You mean on those who are dependent upon her?" asked Lina, a little proudly, yet sadly.

"No, I mean what I said. She will soon grow to be entirely dependent upon you. Any one with a strong will, or indeed with any will at all, can wind her round their little finger. And so her conduct depends entirely on whose little finger she is round *pro tem.* His mother's incapacity is some slight excuse for Neil. He has had no advantages of early training, or of home influence, or whatever people call it. In that he is to be pitied, but in nothing else. How do you get on with the trumpet?"

"Pretty well, I think," replied Lina, smiling.

"That's right; but of course you would. Now, I make perpetual blunders. Only the other day, when I was tired to death of bawling to her, and, to relieve myself, said aside to Neil what a bore it was, I found I had not taken my mouth from the trumpet; so each word was uttered right into her ear. Can you imagine my sensations when she slowly laid down her trumpet and began to weep? You will never commit such blunders as that, and I am sure you will soon gain a good influence over her. Shall you think me impertinent if I give you just one word of warning?"

"I shall think you very kind," said Lina, truthfully.

"Do not ever be taken into the confidence of Mr. Jelfrey, or allow him to patronize you; and do not ditto ditto as regards Lady Athelston's maid."

"I do not think I shall ever feel inclined to do either," replied Lina, promptly.

"That is all right, then. You will soon feel at home here, and, whatever friends you may make, you will always, I hope, look upon me as one of the most—what?—one of the oldest, at all events. Do not look sad. High Athelston

is a splendid place to live in, and there are no more snakes in the grass of this park than of many others. But it is easy to be brave and hopeful for each other, isn't it? And you will say that neither you nor I, though we stand here so pleasantly, know the bitterness of each other's heart. Never mind, it wears away at last. Now, good-bye. Tell Neil we are expecting him to-night at Hawkedale—anxiously, eagerly, wearily."

And with these words, and a bright laugh, Marjorie went away.

"I wish I could have asked her a few questions," she thought, as she drove her old pony down the avenue; "but, somehow, she had a look in her face that prevented me, and that made me talk on indefatigably all the time I staid. She will think I only went to chatter. That does not signify; that is a very small mistake among the many surrounding me. I went for the purpose of trying to make her feel herself at home with me; and though I don't expect that I have succeeded—because success rarely does crown any of my efforts—still, I can not have done much harm, I think."

CHAPTER V.

NIGHT IN NETHER LANE.

All that evening there was a strange nervousness about Lina Chester, a dreamy wonder in her eyes, and an odd watchfulness and listening in every act and glance. She and Lady Athelston dined alone in the brilliant lamp-light; Martin and the twin canaries—as Marjorie Castillain called the footmen—waiting as noiselessly and deferentially as if there had been a row of guests on either side the table.

To Lina, no meal had ever seemed so long before; but at last the dessert was on the table, and she caught herself looking across into Lady Athelston's face with eager anxiety. But Lady Athelston only sipped her wine, and played languidly with the forced fruits which had cost so much labor and expense. So the minutes passed.

"Did you look out that account of the wedding for me, Miss Chester?" she asked at last; and Lina nodded with a smile. An answering smile broke in Lady Athelston's sleepy eyes, and the girl rejoiced to see it.

"Then we will go." And she rose, and took Lina's arm to cross the hall.

"Now, you shall arrange my patchwork," she added, complacently, as she took her seat beside the drawing-room fire, "and I will read this to myself after tea."

Lina's heart beat joyfully. For Lady Athelston to read any thing to herself meant for her to sleep long and soundly.

Under Lina's dexterous fingers, the many-colored diamonds formed themselves artistically; all the better it seemed for the nervous haste of the little hands. The twin canaries brought in the tea, and Lina prepared Lady Athelston's, sipping her own afterward as if with an effort. The trays were carried away; Lady Athelston read a few sentences; and then Lina, watching her anxiously, saw her drop calmly into one of those unruffled sleeps which a book invariably laced for her.

For a few moments the girl sat quite motionless, watching her; then she rose, and walked noiselessly out of the room. Her very breath was held as she ran up the lighted staircase, where her footfall made no sound, and she started back, trembling from head to foot, when, close to her own room door, she came upon Lady Athelston's hawk-eyed maid.

"You are in haste, Miss Chester? Can I assist you?"

"No, thank you," answered Lina, nervously; "I have a headache, and I am going to my room."

"I am sorry, miss," replied Fletcher, regarding her very keenly. "What shall I bring you?"

"Nothing, please — nothing, thank you," faltered Lina; "I only wish to rest, and to be alone."

"My lady is tiring to be with long. I am sure you find her so," insinuated "my lady's" faithful maid.

"I am not tired, only—ill," replied Lina, unconsciously contradicting herself, as she passed on into her own room.

With rapid fingers she changed her evening dress for a black one; then, with quickly beating heart, stood a moment listening. No sound; and she opened her door, and crept down a side staircase, and through the arched west door, near which Sir Neil had waited for her that afternoon. Down the steps, from terrace to terrace, she glided; then crossed the park and gained the path which led toward the limes and the rookery.

Hastening along this, Lina never glanced around her in the darkness until she reached the green door among the trees, which led from the park into Nether Lane. Hastily she drew the bolt, and passed out into the gloomy little road, weird and shadowy even in daylight, but now in dense and utter darkness.

Though she trembled as did the spring leaves above her, Lina went steadily on, until she saw a light glimmering in the upper window of a cottage standing back from the lane. Her eyes were accustomed to the darkness now, and the shadow of the trees was passed, so she could distinguish that two houses were built together, and that the one farther from High Athelston was in darkness.

"That light must be in the woman's bedroom," she said, noiselessly lifting the latch of the garden-gate. "Then this is the right one, and the shutters are shut."

There was not a sound of the girl's cautious footsteps on the gravel, but a little cry of joy escaped her when she saw that, where the shutters should have met, a ray of light shone out into the night. Leaning with trembling hands upon the window-sill, Lina gazed eagerly through that slit in the imperfectly fitting shutters, from which the light crept through to touch her warmly. There was no blind to the window, and she could see a portion of the bare little room, made distinct and bright by the clear, pale light of a paraffine lamp.

Full in this light, a boy of nine or ten sat at a small table, on which a cloth was laid, with two cups and saucers. His head was bent over a book, and Lina could hear the monotonous, childish voice. The sound made her heart throb, as it proved that some one else was in the room —some one to whom he must be reading. She

listened eagerly, hungering for another voice; but no sound interrupted the steady and weariful flow of the reading.

She watched the little figure on its stiff chair, the long delicate face, the ruffled hair, the thin hand and wrist which the coat-sleeve did not cover. Every item was learned off by heart; and then again came the searching gaze around the lighted room, as far as her eyes could grasp it. No other figure came within her sight; for a long time no other voice sounded; and she grew chill and dispirited, though she never stirred, or faltered in her steadfast purpose.

But at last a voice came from the farther end of the room—the voice, evidently, of a man who was busy and engrossed—and the few quick words made every nerve in Lina's frame quiver painfully.

"Put that book away now, Jet. We have had enough food for our minds to-night."

"Don't you like the book, father?" the small voice asked, earnestly.

"Greatly, immensely—pretty well," quoted the quick, engrossed voice; "but I like 'Crusoe' better. Where did you pick up that thrilling gem?"

"I bought it in a shop-window with my Saturday penny, dad."

"Oh! I see—the mortgaged penny for next Saturday week. Now, make the coffee. I shall not be long."

The boy put away his book, and, taking a coffee-pot from the hob, put it on the fire. After intently watching it as the coffee boiled fine, he went back to his old seat, and, apparently glad of a change of occupation, took a comb from his pocket, wrapped it in paper, and began to perform upon it. Not a soothing or harmonious music would this instrument produce at any time, but now it made Lina's head ache acutely. Still she staid on, her ears strained to listen for that other voice, her eyes strained to see another form.

She followed "Poor Mary Ann" to her grave. She sojourned for an indefinite period "In my cottage near a wood." She listened while, for an endless time, "The Heavens were telling." She would have grown really feverish in her anxiety, only that a whistle now and then joined in with the air, a man's whistle, clear and true; and when the child—to whom time was rather a stumbling-block—made a worse than ordinary mistake, the cheery voice stopped him and put him right.

"Plenty, Jet," it called at last, as the boy ended a melancholy strain. "Isn't it rather headachy?"

"I like it, dad, and you are not ready for supper."

"Like it, do ye? Well, go on. Tune up."

Again the whistle joined in with its cheering effect—improvising variations now—and Lina listened without weariness. But as the whistling became more energetic and florid, the comb attempted more energy and floridness too, and she felt that presently she should have to hold her head.

"Suppose you get your violin, and practice properly for a few minutes, Jet. That will do you good," put in the pleasant, busy voice again.

"Oh, dad," pleaded the boy, fretfully, "it makes my ears ache so."

"Peculiar ears. Then suppose you dish up the herrings?"

"They are *so* small, dad," commented the boy, dismally, as he pursued again his culinary performances at the fire. "I could eat both of them myself."

"I could eat half a dozen," was the ready answer; "but, then, it's wicked to overtax one's digestive powers. So, under those circumstances, two are enough for both of us."

"When the woman came to sell them, you said you only bought two because you hadn't change, dad," insisted the boy, with a child's desire to understand the motives of his elders.

"Of course I did. How could I possibly tell that she would not run away forever with a ten-pound note, if I gave it to her to change?"

A laugh, keen and slight, followed the words, and Lina leaned forward more and more eagerly.

"I expect they're done, dad," said the boy, gravely examining the fish.

"Baste them a little, old fellow. I shall not be more than two minutes now."

"Only two minutes now," echoed Lina below her breath.

"Come, father, I'm sure they're done," whined the lad, with a certain patient tiredness unusual in a child's voice and face. "Come, and look."

"Oh, nonsense! You know whether they are done, quite as well as I do myself."

"They are bubbling into bladders. Do let us have supper now, dad. I am so sleepy and so hungry, and it is such a while since tea, and I had not very much then."

"Jet, you are one of those peculiar lads gifted with eternal appetite," was the answer, in a tone which was so full of widely different thoughts that Lina read a whole story in the words—a story of regret, of longing, of hopelessness, yet of wide kindliness and love.

"Now I am ready."

Lina heard a chair pushed back on the boarded floor, and then a figure sauntered into her sight. For an instant she started back, a quick breath, almost a cry, escaping her parted lips; then she was quite still again in her old position.

"For what we are going to receive, O Lord, make us thankful. Amen."

She saw the two sit down after the simple grace, and share the herrings exactly between them—one for the big, strong, hungry man, one for the hungry child. She saw the little hands pour out the coffee deftly. She heard the merry words that passed between the two. She saw the faces sometimes smiling merrily, and sometimes catching a grave and lonely look which did not seem new to either. She remembered the abundant, luxurious dinner which she had left untasted a few hours before. She pictured the rich, warm rooms to which she would return; and as she did so, the little bare room before her grew dim and misty, and, with her hands clasped and her tearless sobs suffocating her, she turned away before the anguished words forced themselves again and again through her white lips.

"Oh, why did he come—why did he come? Only four years—only four. My God! I feel as if the fear would kill me!"

Lina never remembered her walk back to High Athelston that night, until, when she opened the gate among the firs, she came suddenly upon Sir Neil walking toward her. The kind and pitiful darkness hid her face from his inquisitive gaze,

and she schooled her voice to calmness as best she could.

"I came to meet you, Miss Chester," he began at once. But he waited in vain for a reply. They were walking together now, side by side, along the gravel path; and Neil, though he tried to loiter with her, felt obliged to quicken his steps to keep up with hers.

"Jelfrey is here; he came up Nether Lane; so you understand how I knew where you were. Miss Chester," Neil added, in the wooing tones which he generally found irresistible; "why did you not let me walk with you? I would have been home from Hawkedale in good time, if you had only hinted such a wish to me."

"I preferred going alone, thank you, Sir Neil."

"But about here," rejoined Sir Neil, a little angrily, "ladies do not walk in the lanes alone after night-fall."

In her utter incapacity for excusing herself, Lina felt her voice grow hot and angry, and she hastened her steps still more.

"Miss Chester," pleaded Neil, keeping beside her, "will you promise me not to go again? I wish you to feel yourself under my care, as—as any young-lady guest at High Athelston would be. And I can always be at your service, in the dark or daylight. Will you promise me?"

"I am used to being alone, and I should only break such a promise if I made it," rejoined Lina, rather tremulously.

"I think I have a right to this," said the baronet, now really provoked.

"I do not think so, Sir Neil."

"At any rate," he interrupted, throwing away his half-smoked cigar with a gesture of impatience, "my mother, I suppose, has such a right; and I hope she will exercise it."

"Let me go in, please," entreated Lina, while her hands ached in their strained clasp.

"*I* did not tempt you out into the night and cold and darkness," said Sir Neil, with an angry scorn which frightened her; "and *now* you force me to believe Jelfrey, when he says that this walk of yours was not one in which you would care for a companion."

"I do not understand Mr. Jelfrey's suspicions," answered Lina, proudly. "I would not care even to try to do so."

And then she passed him, and entered the house with a cool, slow step.

"Did I make a fool of myself, or rather did she make a fool of me?" he soliloquized. "Of course, I lose my advantage by showing how much I care for her words. I wish I could keep cool through every thing, as Jelfrey can. But I act like an idiot by letting my temper get the better of me when I fail to move her. And she so calm and cool!"

Calm and cool! Would he have said it if he had seen Lina take off her black dress with feverish fingers, and with hot tears in her eyes?

Calm and cool! He might have said it a few minutes afterward, if he had seen her enter the drawing-room in her white dress, and pass Eustace Jelfrey as if he had been invisible.

CHAPTER VI.

MARJORIE'S HOME.

LADY ATHELSTON'S low phaeton stood on the gravel sweep, and the two fat ponies in their glittering harness waited resignedly for Lina to take the reins and let them trot stolidly down the avenue. But she would not take her seat until Lady Athelston had appeared, and settled herself—a lengthened performance generally—upon her cushions.

Lina stood a little aside now, waiting for her; and as she stood so, Sir Neil came from the house and joined her.

"How seriously you have been looking over to the hills, Miss Chester! Were you wishing to drive thither instead of to Hawkedale?"

"I think I was," replied Lina, smiling. "The sunlight lies so warm and bright there."

"You have never been to the hills, have you?" questioned Neil, with an eagerness in his tone which he tried in vain to hide. "Will you come to-day, after lunch?"

"Not to-day, thank you, Sir Neil," answered Lina as gently as she could.

"Why not to-day? Why must I always be refused?" he asked, the hot blood rising to his face.

"Lady Athelston said she would take me some day; so she of course will arrange when it shall be."

"Are you going to pin all your wishes and desires to Lady Athelston's cap-strings?" interrupted Lady Athelston's son, pettishly. "Surely you have a will of your own?"

"Yes," replied Lina, with quiet coolness. "I have a will of my own."

"If my mother takes it into her head to do the honors of our hills herself," said Neil, trying to speak lightly and pleasantly again, "I know she will be glad of my help and company; she always is; and we will make a picnic. I will help her to show you the celebrated spots among the Highshire hills. You do not thank me, Miss Chester; you do not even assent to my proposal, or acknowledge my wish to please you," he went on, with impatience; "but it can not be that you really dislike me, for you have no cause. I have always been — been anxious to win your regard, and I can hardly yet have seriously displeased you in any way. You will not always be so distant and disagreeable—I beg your pardon; but I believe you wish to be, and would be, if such a thing were really possible to you."

"I think, Sir Neil," said Lina, a tremor in her low voice as she tried to speak with easy indifference, "if you had been kind and courteous to your mother's companion from the first, because she came a stranger and alone to your house; if, when you knew I was unprotected, and felt I was —was inferior to the ladies to whom you would naturally and willingly show deference, or even mere politeness, you had shown me just a little consideration and courtesy — instead of placing me at once, and in the presence even of your servant, in the insignificant position which it evidently seemed to you my only right to fill, I would have believed your wish, expressed since then, that I should be happy and at home here. But I never can think of that, because the first impression fixed itself so deeply on my mind; and I know that your politeness to me now must be an effort. So—"

"Oh, Miss Chester! do believe me—" interrupted Neil.

But she spoke on, still gravely:

"So I choose to maintain now, Sir Neil, just the position in which your reception placed me. This must be always so."

"What do you mean, Miss Chester?" he cried, excitedly. "Do you really resent, so cruelly, my hasty words in the station on the night you arrived?"

"I could not help hearing them," she answered, simply, "and I can not help remembering them."

"Can I not blot them from your memory by all my respect, my admiration, my—"

Lina interrupted him quietly.

"You have not done so yet, Sir Neil. You knew that I was waiting there, alone and tired and cold; not a lady visitor to High Athelston, to be met and welcomed generously; only Lady Athelston's new companion, a kind of servant, whose duty it was to wait until they chose to send from the inn, and with whom you had nothing to do, while your cares were all devoted to your dogs. Is it odd that I remember this, and think sometimes how ignorantly I have fancied other than this the conduct of a gentleman? The word is a pleasant word, Sir Neil, and one's thoughts give it a meaning, perhaps, which is incorrect."

"These words of yours are unjust and cruel," said Neil, with angry emphasis; "you make no allowance for me. You never imagine how different from *you* have been all my mother's—"

"Hush, please," interrupted Lina, "there is no need to bring others into the conversation. I have no wish to learn now, so late, that politeness is not due to all women."

"Still your words are positively unjust," persisted Neil, vehemently. "Tell me one thing, are you so proud to me because—because they have told you of my engagement to Miss Castillain?"

Lina raised her eyes to his in simple, slow surprise; and under their gaze the scarlet rushed to the roots of his hair.

"If I *am* engaged, I may ask you to be friendly with me, to—like me, and not to spurn me when I— By Heaven! I do not know what to say, for I—I admire you with all my heart and soul; and I do not believe 'admire' is the right word, after all."

The half-frightened, half-angry darkening of Lina's eyes, still fixed upon his face, could not stop the unkind, impetuous words. Before they were all uttered, she had moved slowly away.

"Miss Chester," he cried, in a low, anxious whisper, "stay, please stay!"

She half turned. Within twenty yards the servants stood about the carriage, and Lina, always thoughtful, knew they would wonder, and make their own comments on his eagerness.

So they sauntered on, side by side, easy and careless; though Neil, still feeling the hot blood tingle in his face, tilted his hat as low as he could over his eyes.

"I suppose you will be away now all morning," he remarked, moodily; "and you would not give those sleepy little beasts one extra cut, if I were to beg it of you from now until you start."

"Not one."

The behavior of Sir Neil Athelston should not make her unhappy—not more unhappy, at least, than she could help. He should not even see that it had any effect at all, except—except just to prove that no words of his could move her, or make her forget for one minute the position she occupied in his house; the position which he had tacitly assigned to her before he saw her.

"Do make haste home though, really," he urged; "I have nothing to do, and shall be looking out for you."

"Nothing to do!" she echoed. "You are to be pitied, indeed, Sir Neil."

"I suppose you would not have me go about among my men and ask them to let me do their work for them, would you, Miss Chester?" he asked, laughing. "There is not one of them who has enough to occupy himself, not to speak of occupying an able-bodied fellow like me, too; and I have no business of my own to transact this morning. Somehow, the new early-rising system leaves the middle of the day bare of employment. I have a few letters to write, but they will soon be done; and then I shall only be wanting you to come back. You look very grave, Miss Chester, but really I can not be what you seem to insinuate I ought to be. I can not descend to the level of a bee, and improve the shining hours. Man's a rational animal, you know. And do you think that even the little busy bee would be such a little busy fool as to gather honey all the day unless he wanted it? Till I feel such a want, I will avoid such an exertion. Now, Miss Chester, own that that is plain common sense."

"There is Lady Athelston," she said, hastening on, and avoiding any answer to his silly speech.

"Neil, are *you* coming?" exclaimed his mother, astonished as she saw him leaning against the phaeton.

"Not quite," he answered, laughing; "your funereal pace is rather more than a human being endowed with only ordinary patience can stand."

"I do not like driving fast," rejoined Lady Athelston, deprecatingly. "You will not forget that, will you, Miss Chester?" she added, turning to Lina her sleepy eyes almost piteously.

Lina nodded, with her beautiful, grave smile, and took the ponies on at a walk; while Neil, looking as if he could have heartily laughed at himself the while, strolled on down the avenue at his mother's side.

"You might come with us," she urged, pathetically; "you so seldom come with me, Neil."

The words stopped him at once. He raised his hat with a laugh, though his eyes gravely waited for Lina's recognition of his glance.

"Give my love to the Misses Castillain," he said, in a light aside to her; and then he turned from the avenue, and sauntered on in idleness till he was summoned into the house to receive visitors.

Lina Chester looked about her with interest, as well as curiosity, when they reached Hawkedale. She remembered all that Marjorie had told her with such random honesty, and she felt anxious to see the home of this girl who had been so friendly with her.

In the great dingy drawing-room into which Lady Athelston and Lina were ushered there sat a gentleman and two ladies. One of these ladies rose at once, greeting Lady Athelston delighted-

ly as she led her to a chair. She was a girl of about Lina's age, with a narrow, handsome face, pointed features, very fair hair dressed to hang low on her neck, and two real beauties in a pair of tiny shell-like ears, and finely shaped white hands. Louisa Castillain was wont to boast that she possessed all those beauties which are the symbols of high birth. "The symbols are fallible," Marjorie used to say, with ready spite. "My birth is, unfortunately, the same as yours, and I possess none of the labels of aristocracy. No water in the world would be persuaded to run steadily under my instep; and my ears are as ugly as Mozart's. What a bad thing, isn't it, that we can not entirely lose the taint of plebeianism we inherit from our gardener grandfather—Adam?"

"It *is* kind of you to have come," Louisa Castillain said, impressively, as she took Lady Athelston's parasol. "And not long ago, do you know, we were talking of you."

"Gushing, eh?" remarked Marjorie to Lina, without troubling herself to lower her voice.

"Miss Castillain—Miss Chester," began Lady Athelston, introducing the girls in her gentle, sleepy voice. And Louisa, half turning to the "companion," gave her a slow, slight bow.

"Miss Marjorie Castillain—Miss Chester," she went on; "Miss Chester—Mr. Jelfrey."

To Lady Athelston's surprise, Marjorie promptly and warmly took Lina's hand.

"I have the advantage of Louisa," she said into Lady Athelston's trumpet; "I have seen Miss Chester before. I called upon her at High Athelston, and we are friends already—lasting ones, I hope."

Was it Lady Athelston's surprised glance only, or was it Mr. Jelfrey's, which prompted Marjorie to say this? The words were certainly addressed to Lady Athelston; but Marjorie's defiant eyes were fixed on Eustace Jelfrey as she finished speaking, and under their gaze he colored a little, and perhaps wished that he, too, had offered his hand to Lady Athelston's companion, instead of frigidly following Miss Castillain's example. Perhaps to make up for this, perhaps from a secret motive of his own, he took up his station within easy speaking distance of Lina, addressing various remarks to her, which she received and answered with a quiet indifference. Lady Athelston talked on placidly from her large chair, and Louisa hovered about her, or sat on a low chair near, using every power of entertainment which she possessed.

"Worshiping according to her lights," as Marjorie said aside to Lina and Mr. Jelfrey.

"Marjorie," said Louisa, turning and facing her with pathetic displeasure, "I fear you forget you are in the presence of affliction. "Don't you think it would be more Christian, as well as more lady-like, to remember dear Lady Athelston's deafness?"

It struck more than Lina that this speech, so pointed and so clearly uttered, was intended particularly for the deaf ears; but Marjorie answered it as cheerfully, if not as gratefully, as if it had been the kindest and most sisterly bit of advice. Then she turned again to Lina, with a sigh of relief.

"If you and Mr. Jelfrey had not been here, I should have quarreled with her outright."

"We are unfortunate, indeed, in having marred your enjoyment, Miss Marjorie," said Jelfrey, gazing at her in curious surprise and keen admiration.

The handsome tutor was wont to say that Marjorie Castillain wanted form and repose; yet no eyes followed her every movement with the covert eagerness with which his did; no ears drank in her pleasant words as thirstily as his.

"I am very cautious about what people think of me," exclaimed Marjorie, demurely, "and so I never fight Louisa in public. Besides, we should have no chance, Mr. Jelfrey—I and Miss Chester, against you and my sister."

"You understand, then, exactly how we should divide?"

"Exactly," assented Marjorie, with promptness. "I understand, too, how terribly dangerous such a conjunction would be for us! You have no idea, Miss Chester, of the strength of Louisa's pretty little hand, or of the exquisite skill she exhibits in selecting one's weakest points for attack."

"And I, Miss Marjorie?" asked Jelfrey, with a smile of feigned reproach.

"You?" deliberated Marjorie, with inimitable *sang-froid*. "Oh! I don't know about you, because you have weapons at your command which I don't understand."

"Then you consider," he said, his manner a little embarrassed, "that the united cause of yourself and Miss Chester would come to grief?"

"Yes. Lady Athelston," Marjorie continued, sauntering to her chair and leaning over the back, as she spoke quietly into the elevated trumpet, "are you tired of Louisa yet?"

"Tired, dear!" she echoed, astonished.

"Yes; because when you are, please to mention it, as Louisa is not fanciful, and will never imagine such a case. When you are, Mr. Jelfrey wants to tell you one or two items of news he has gleaned for our benefit. What do you think is one?"

"What?" asked her listener, eagerly.

"That Colonel Stuart—he did not hear it from Colonel Stuart himself, but that never makes *any* difference—has made an offer to Lady Helen Burton, and been refused."

"Not true," returned Lady Athelston, promptly and decisively. "He has never even admired her."

"But, dear Lady Athelston, what has that to do with it?" inquired Marjorie, opening her frank brown eyes in comical surprise. "You don't understand the love-making of the nineteenth century so well as I do. If I see a gentleman and lady treating each other with systematic indifference, I am pretty sure that they have chosen each other out of all the world. If their indifference amounts to neglect, then I am sure they would die for each other. And if I see a gentleman paying attention to a lady, I am equally sure he is in love with her—mother, or aunt, or any other relation."

Some note in Marjorie's voice gave this speech a tone of bitter earnestness which two at least of her listeners detected, though only one could appreciate the irony of the last sentence. Yet all the while her face was full of irrepressible mirth, and her eyes had the comical look of a child who, enjoying the mischief it has done, waits in timid expectation of the punishment.

"I shall tell Neil your opinion of *his* love-

making," said Lady Athelston, not without vexation in her voice, though she smiled; "Miss Chester, you are witness."

"Don't bring Miss Chester in," entreated Marjorie, hastily. "If one girl forms an opinion from her own experience, it is very unjust that another—whose experience is likely to have been widely different—should have to indorse it."

"*I* should be very sorry to have to indorse it," said Miss Castillain, looking slowly and smilingly round. "I find that the gentlemen of the nineteenth century know exactly how to pay attention in the most acceptable and agreeable manner."

This speech, though deposited in Lady Athelston's trumpet, was intended for another destination too, and evidently reached it. Mr. Jelfrey bowed with a courteous, pleasant smile.

"Being the only representative of the sex present," he said, "my unworthy thanks are all your kind words can win, Miss Castillain. And I hope you agree with me in thinking that the men of the nineteenth century—with the men of the eighteen previous centuries—are influenced in their love-making (I will retain your sister's word) by the conduct of the ladies to whom they are making the love. I hope you think this, and that Miss Chester, at any rate, thinks so too."

He looked a very handsome and intelligent specimen of the nineteenth-century man when he spoke, and Lina's eyes were riveted upon him, while the color slowly rose in her face at his words.

"Is she assenting to his words or denying them?" mused Marjorie. "Is she angry with *him*, or with some one of whom his words remind her?"

"Have I any right to ask you, Miss Marjorie," concluded Mr. Jelfrey, rather earnestly, "what reason you have for thinking us either cold or deceitful?"

"I have no other but a woman's reason: I think you so because I think you so."

Marjorie's eyes, so gravely mischievous, went back to their quiet observation of Lina, until Lady Athelston looked up and touched the round arms that were crossed on the back of her chair.

"I only want you not to pretend that you speak from experience, my dear," she said. "We can take all your nonsense for what it is worth, if you won't tell a direct falsehood. *You* can not meet with coldness from one you love, or deceit from one who loves you."

"Can't I?" laughed Marjorie, while the red flamed in her face with a vivid suddenness. "Why not?"

"Because all those things have been arranged for you, and there is no deficiency in your courtship."

"Oh, none!" rejoined Marjorie, raising her eyes sublimely.

"You and Neil are sure to agree entirely about that sort of thing," resumed Lady Athelston, graciously; "you are both just the persons to win attention and admiration."

"Listen, ye shades!" cried the girl. "I don't know about Neil," she added, her laughing lips again at the trumpet, "but I am 'just the person' to win nobody's attention and admiration, etc.; but if I ever did, it would be those of 'just the person' I never could care for. Is not that a bad state of affairs, Lady Athelston?"

"It is partly Marjorie's own fault that people see no good qualities in her," put in Louisa, seeing nothing of the stern compression of Jelfrey's lips. "She will not even make a little show in society. I don't mind what she does here at home with me; but I think she owes it to society to show some different feeling. I hear many people say she is not at all like a Castillain."

"Tidings of hope," put in Marjorie.

"But," resumed Louisa, pityingly, "like some uncouth peasant-girl dressed up."

"Any peasant-girl who could 'dress up' on my allowance would be a prodigy quite worthy of my imitation," said Marjorie, good-humoredly.

"You have the same as I have, dear," rejoined Louisa, looking up innocently from her low seat.

"Don't let us discuss that," interposed her sister, with sudden gravity. "We have bickered enough, and on that subject I rarely keep my temper, especially when you call me 'dear.' Lady Athelston, if you'll ask me, I'll go back with you to High Athelston."

This was speedily arranged, very much to Lady Athelston's satisfaction, and more still to Lina's.

"Yet I don't know exactly why I like her," she mused to herself, thinking of Marjorie, and unconsciously repeating the words. "I see Mr. Jelfrey is in a state of hot vexation at her going. I suppose it is a holiday for him, and he is spending it here; but he will stay and solace himself with her sister, I dare say. *She* will not hasten him away. Yes, he *is* playing a double game."

From the back of the phaeton—for she could not be induced to take Lina's place—Marjorie Castillain talked cheerfully to Lady Athelston; almost entirely upsetting Lina's gravity now and then by an aside, always funny, though never malicious; quite aloud and placidly uttered, yet certainly not intended for Lady Athelston's ears. It was a pleasant drive for them all, and it was a pleasant surprise to find Colonel Stuart with Sir Neil when they reached High Athelston.

CHAPTER VII.

FACE TO FACE.

Colonel Stuart and Marjorie were both persuaded to stop for the day; but the colonel only did so on condition that the young people would walk with him in the afternoon to the cottages in Nether Lane, as he had an appointment with the artist who was living there.

"Lady Athelston, may I ask you to spare Miss Chester for an hour or two?" he said.

"I think—I think Lady Athelston will be sure—to want me," stammered Lina, with that frightened, shrinking look which was not new to her.

"Oh, you must come," said Marjorie, with a decision which was very gentle and quiet in all its fun, "if it is only just for the pleasure of comparing this call with the one you made this morning. Why, you won't hear so much scandal talked there through all the afternoon—if you stay—as you heard Louisa and me pour into

Lady Athelston's ear during the first ten minutes she was in our house."

"Miss Chester, I am sure, is not a worshiper of the Blatant Beast," said Colonel Stuart, with a smile for Lina.

"That, Miss Chester," explained Marjorie, with a quick flash of pain in her eyes, "is scandal—slander in Spenser's old English, but scandal in modern English, a more pettifogging word, and more appropriate. We are great gossips at Hawkedale, and gossip always degenerates into scandal."

"I know an old lady who encourages you finely," put in Neil, shrugging his shoulders with an amused glance at his mother.

"And I know a young gentleman who encourages us finely too," said Marjorie in the same tone; "but whether it's Colonel Stuart, or Sir Neil Athelston, or Mr. Jelfrey, I won't tell."

"Why don't you say 'One of the three; I won't say which, but it is not Colonel Stuart, or you, Neil, like the boy and his grandmother and the cat? We should not understand it a bit better than we do now," laughed the young baronet.

"Thoroughly in the dark," retorted Marjorie, audaciously. "You will come?" she added to Lina, almost appealingly.

"I am rather surprised at *your* willingness to go, Miss Marjorie," said the colonel. "It is not a week since you told me that paying calls to strangers was a species of day-mare, worse to you than any nightmare."

"But I called on Miss Chester after that," returned Marjorie, lightly, "and I found it so pleasant that I changed my mind. By-the-way, Colonel Stuart, will you tell her how you first met with Mr. Spendir? I believe I told her every thing about him except that, and that I forgot."

Lina moved a little apart from them all, and nervously took Lady Athelston's work from the table. Neil's eyes followed her.

"How bored she looks at the idea of hearing the history of this precious artist!" he thought.

"I was in the Strand one day, when in London, Miss Chester," said the colonel, using but few words for his story, "and a photograph exposed for sale took my fancy. While I waited in the shop, I could not help hearing a gentleman—shabby enough, but still a gentleman—urgently requesting the master of the shop to purchase from him a few original sketches. I listened for a good while, my heart literally aching for the poor fellow; then, instead of buying the photograph, I took Mr. Spendir's sketches. Afterward, when I wanted an artist to illustrate my father's book, I remembered him. That's all. No wonder Miss Marjorie forgot, was it?"

"Had he been painting all his life, and never sold a picture before?" asked Marjorie, showing no sign in her voice of the pity with which she had spoken of this artist to Lina only a few days before.

"No. He told me he had been accustomed to gain a livelihood—a very good livelihood—by his voice, but that it had failed him, and that the possibility of that was over—over, I hope, only for a time."

Lina's hands had dropped the work now, and her eyes were wide and hot. It seemed to her that every one in the room was intently and questioningly watching her.

"What a much jollier life that must have been for him than this one is!"

A very grave look Colonel Stuart gave Marjorie when she said this.

"Perhaps he may have other ideas of the 'jollier life'—you chose the term, Miss Marjorie, so pardon my adopting it—but this life may be as good a one, don't you think?"

"Depends," returned Marjorie, with random thoughtlessness, "on his receipts and disbursements."

And the instant the words had left her lips she could have cried out in anger with herself. Why was it that he always made her ashamed of herself—made her feel herself heartless and worldly? Why must she always show her worst to him, whatever different intentions she might have had? Why could she never help it?

But whatever Marjorie felt, she showed nothing of it in his presence. She would never, she said to herself, show him that his words could influence her in any way. She never would show him that she cared for his approbation—never. How could she? when he treated her with calm and never-varying coldness, often amounting, she fancied, to contempt. What did it matter to him how much of her words were felt and how much feigned? She would never condescend to make it plain to *him*. This was Marjorie's decision, often and often repeated; always acted upon. Others have acted—to the marring of their lives—upon just such vain, humble, contradictory thoughts.

Lady Athelston of course spared Lina when requested by so many, and the party set out together rather quietly. But as they walked on, in the beautiful sunshine of the spring afternoon, Marjorie's spirits rose to their usual buoyancy, and Lina's eyes lost their dreary, hunted look. She listened—though very, very quietly—while Colonel Stuart told her of the artist and his home, and she felt glad then that she had seen both it and him, and that nothing to-day could take her by surprise.

"An odd name, hasn't he, Miss Chester?" Sir Neil was speaking to her across Miss Castillain, as they walked in a row along the shadowy lane. "Yet Stuart says he's gentlemanly. Did you think so, Marjorie?"

"If his manners were not polished, his coat-sleeves were," replied Marjorie, with nonchalance.

"And what about his boots?" laughed Neil. "I'll wager to know a gentleman anywhere by his boots."

"His boots? Oh, they were slippers," returned Marjorie below her breath, as she screwed up her lips mysteriously. "Whisper it not in Gath; make it not a subject of conversation in Askelon; but I believe he had a paper collar."

"We might never have been aware of these things if you had not given us the benefit of your keener perceptions, Miss Marjorie," remarked Colonel Stuart, meaningly, while Neil laughed with hearty enjoyment.

"And I shouldn't wonder if he has not even paper wristbands on to-day, as you are expected, Colonel Stuart, and he will know that one or two ladies are sure to attend you."

"You are perfect in your appreciation of satire, Marjorie. Isn't she, Miss Chester?" asked Neil, only trying to win a glance or word from Lina.

"And in its use," added the colonel, quietly. "Do you see any satire, Miss Marjorie, in the old Latin proverb that says, God looks to clean, not filled, hands?"

"Not exactly," returned the girl, saucily still, "but I see an unpleasant implication that the filled and clean hands do not go together. And that makes me uncomfortably wonder about my own—and Neil's—and yours—and Miss Chester's."

And now that Marjorie had succeeded in drawing Lina into the conversation, she was content, and took but a minor part herself again, until they reached the two small white cottages lying back in the vegetable gardens.

"It is not exactly a winding avenue," remarked Neil, as he held the wicket open; "but it is bordered with stately potato-plants, and has a beautiful regularity which can not lead us astray."

By a clever manœuvre, skillfully performed while he spoke, Neil managed to place himself at Lina Chester's side, and to slacken his pace a little to make the walk beside her last longer. So it happened that they two did not enter the cottage kitchen until a few minutes after Colonel Stuart and Marjorie had done so. But Lina was not too late to catch the last few words of the colonel's courteous apology to Mr. Spendir for being later than he had arranged to be; and her heart gave a great leap as she looked at the two standing together, meeting easily and courteously, as gentlemen meet on equal ground. But one minute afterward the heart-beats ceased; the soft pink flush that had risen in her cheeks as she entered the cottage faded, and left her face paler even than its wont; the beautiful dark eyes dropped as if a sudden invisible touch had closed them; for Colonel Stuart was introducing her to the artist, and Sir Neil and Miss Castillain were standing near.

Mr. Spendir bowed, very low and very politely, and Lina—still without looking up—held out her hand to him as by some uncontrollable impulse. Neil Athelston's brows were drawn together over his angry, half-closed eyes. Marjorie's lips broke into a smile. Colonel Stuart watched the two, narrowly, keenly, almost cruelly in his intense earnestness.

Fitz Spendir, in a shabby coat stained with paint, stood opposite this girl, and clasped her hand for just one second — his breath coming quick and hard, and his lips growing white and rigid—he then turned again, easily and naturally, to show Colonel Stuart the sketch at which he had been working when they entered. When it had been thoroughly examined and criticised, the visitors moved about the room, glancing at other sketches which lay or hung about. None of them were very clever, none of them, as Neil whispered to Lina, gave proofs of a genius which would cut its way into fame. But all, as Marjorie added, exhibited talent, at any rate, and patient, painstaking earnestness.

In one corner of the room hung a small water-color drawing, before which Lina stood so long and so silently that the others left her there, and moved on. It was a very trivial work of art at best, and there were a vague unreality and incorrectness in it which would not fail to strike even a casual observer; yet a rich and harmonious blending of autumn tints redeemed it. None of the imperfections did Lina notice as she stood so long before the little picture, her hands clasped, and her eyes filled with unshed tears.

Yet it was only this. An old church-porch, with a heavy, leaning cross upon its roof. Just outside this porch, in the gravel-path, a stone that marked a grave, and on it one name only written, "Magdalen." Lina's lips moved as she read it over and over again. The two lines carved below the name she knew, even without following the words:

> "This simple stone shall bear a simple line:
> Here lies a sinner saved by grace Divine."

A little aside from the gravel path stood a broken sun-dial, the long grass climbing about its base, and clinging to its worn and crumbled pedestal.

"It is an uninteresting little sketch — to a stranger, Miss Chester. I did not even paint it from nature."

The voice was only Mr. Spendir's, but Lina started as if it had reached her from the church-porch, or the grave upon which her eyes were fixed.

"From memory, I suppose?" asked Sir Neil, glancing at the sketch because Lina did so, but with intense carelessness; guessing nothing of how this painted memory was woven into the past and future history of his house.

"Yes, from memory — the memory of a description given me many years ago," answered the artist, without glancing at Sir Neil.

"You must have thought long and much of it," remarked the baronet, wishing this stupid call was over.

Then Fitz Spendir looked for the first time full into his face—into the lazy, handsome Saxon face — and answered, with a fierce and savage flash of short-lived passion in his eyes,

"I think a good deal about it still. If you ever chance to see the place, I hope you will recognize it again."

"Oh, readily," answered Sir Neil, noticing nothing odd in the speech or the speaker. "Though painted from memory, it possesses reality enough for that." And then he opened the door, and stood upon the step waiting, and pondering how he could arrange to walk beside Lina along the quiet, shadowy lane.

But the departure was not to be yet. Just as Sir Neil opened the door, a boy darted past him into the house, and pulled up breathlessly beside the artist. Curiously Lina looked from the strong, handsome, bearded face above to the narrow, young, pinched features below.

"She says—she says," stammered the child, hardly yet having seen the visitors, "that we're both scamps, and oughtn't to be allowed to live here; and then she never minds, because we're sure to be turned out soon."

"Is that Mrs. Cheere next door?" asked Marjorie, coming to the rescue with her quick, kindly tact. "Oh! she is rude to every body. It's a kind of madness. Your little boy would be sorry for her, instead of angry, Mr. Spendir, if he knew how miserable she makes herself, as well as every body else."

"The gloomy individual has rather an inappropriate name," struck in Neil, lounging a little nearer to the group as they stood ready to separate.

"Jet offended her mortally last evening," said the artist, lightly laying his hand on the child's

disheveled hair—"I'll tell you how. She is accustomed to wear two large white aprons in the house on a Sunday, one before and one behind, for the protection of her best frock—gown—dress; I don't know which she calls it. On Sunday evening she forgot, before she went to church, to take off the one that protects the back of her dress. Jet saw her as she came home, and told her of it. I don't wonder she was mortified, and vented her anger on the boy; but he can not appreciate the justice of the case."

"Is she often angry and cross with him?"

Mr. Spendir smiled a little as he answered Lina's very quiet question, perhaps amused because it was the first she had asked him.

"Very often, indeed; but what is a boy worth if he can not bear such a thing as that?"

"She is rude and cross to most with whom she comes in contact," said Colonel Stuart; "but, as Miss Castillain says, it is a kind of madness now; a madness for which she is not unblamable (though she is to be pitied), as she has brought it on herself by the fostering of a rebellious grief."

"There is some slight excuse for her," exclaimed Marjorie. "Shall I tell you, Mr. Spendir, or would you rather not hear a word about her?"

"I should like to hear it, if it excuses her," he answered. "Is it a grief which is likely to be lessened by the pursuit of a universal revenge?"

"Nearly thirty years ago," said Marjorie, smiling, "she had a little girl—an only child—in whom her whole heart was wrapped up, for her husband had died before her baby's birth. One evening she was showing the child, to amuse her, the watch and chain which had been her father's, and slipped them round her neck. 'When you are grown up,' the mother said, 'this is to be yours; but I've another present for you to-night instead;' and she gave into the little one's hand a common gilded locket, containing two plaits of hair, her father's and her mother's, with the names under. Of course the child knew no difference in the real value of the things, but still she was unwilling to have the glittering gold chain taken from her neck, and she put up her hands to keep the watch that looked so bright against her white pinafore. Just then there came a knock upon the front door, and the little girl ran delightedly to open it, anxious most probably for an opportunity of displaying her brilliant ornaments. The mother sat there waiting. She heard no voices, but, in only a few seconds, the door was shut again; and so she sat there waiting for her little girl's return. Mr. Spendir, to this very hour she seems to me to be just waiting still for her little girl's return, and just still suffering the misery of that hour."

"But how was it?" questioned Lina, with a great pity in her eyes; "was the child stolen just for the sake of the watch and chain?"

"Hardly, Miss Chester; because I should think they might have been taken from her without her making any sound that would have committed the thieves. The idea was that she was stolen partly for her own sake. She was an exceedingly pretty little girl—a beautiful, little fairy-like thing, I believe. That's five-and-twenty years ago, and such crimes were not so rare then as they are now; though even now we hear and read of them sometimes, don't we?"

"I expect the chain and watch were the real temptation," remarked Sir Neil, "and the child was an after-thought."

"And so the mother is to be excused a little of her acidity, isn't she?" asked Marjorie, turning with a smile to the artist and his boy. "As I tell you, she seems to be still always looking for her daughter; her little girl, as she calls her, though the little girl would be nearly thirty now. She has grown poor in her search. She spent all her husband's money—he was in a position above her, and married her for her beauty, though you would not guess it now—in prosecuting it in the best and most vigorous manner, and, having only a small annuity of her own left, she has had to remove from a pleasant house in Churchill to this cottage. Poor thing! one can not help pitying her, though at the same time one can not help wishing she bore her trial differently. But, after all, I pity her neighbors more than herself, knowing how terribly penetrating her temper is."

"Has she never obtained any clue to the discovery of the child, Miss Castillain?" inquired Fitz. "Does she search the papers?"

"She used to read all she could buy, but they made her so miserable she could not bear it at last."

"So now Miss Castillain takes them to her," added Sir Neil, feeling exceedingly bored by this time, and thinking to hasten the end of the narrative. "Every few days she brings a budget of papers to the fair and upright Dorcas, and after reading the cream of them all, destroys them."

"Because it seems to me," said Marjorie, flushing a little as she did when any generous act of hers—always secretly performed—was brought to light, "that I never open a newspaper without seeing first of all some account of an accident to a child. Scalded—drowned—run over—burned—shot—whatever it may be, I know that the first thing I shall light upon will be some accident to a child. But," she added, with her bright laugh, as she noticed the gravity on the faces round her, "I dare say they are many of them inventions of the—what do you call them, Neil?—penny-a-liners, isn't it?"

"I wish the accidents we read of *were* all fabrications, Miss Castillain," said Colonel Stuart, in just the tone which made Marjorie sure that she had uttered a silly and unfeeling speech—as she had done then, knowing it to be so. "And is a penny a line an irresistible temptation for untruth?"

"Our neighbor is so very disagreeable, as far as my knowledge goes, Miss Castillain," said the artist, the scarlet rising slowly in his sunburned face as he spoke to her, "that I think your going constantly to read to her and see her is a greater act of generosity than many would care to perform."

"Oh, I don't go very often," returned Marjorie, turning away the subject lightly, as she still felt the colonel's rebuke. "She does not like me to go in the mornings, when she wears her own gray hair; and I don't like going in the evenings, when she wears her brown front."

Fitz was laughing—a short, clear laugh, which was the first they had heard from him—but just at that moment Neil bent to speak to Lina in a low tone, and the laugh died shortly and suddenly on his lips. He might have heard Sir Neil's few meaningless words if he had tried; he might have seen Lina's silent and utterly indifferent reception of them; but neither of these things pre-

vented the gathering of a dark, revengeful anger in his eyes. They would all have shaken hands with him before they left, but he stood back a little, and simply bowed. Then he closed the door upon them, and sat down at once to his work again, without one glance through the window.

"Colonel Stuart," asked Marjorie, as they two walked side by side down the stiff little garden, some distance behind the others, "did it strike you that Mr. Spendir was very indifferent to Sir Neil's criticism—almost rudely so?"

"No, I think not. Was he?"

"I'm not quite sure that he really was so, because what reason could there have been? But I'm sure that the idea struck me."

Again Neil's plans were frustrated by some unperceived tact; for soon after they reached the lane, Colonel Stuart and Marjorie joined Sir Neil and Lina, and they walked on in a row again under the softly whispering leaves.

That evening was a bright and pleasant one at High Athelston. Lina began to think, what Lady Athelston had known for years, that no party could be dull of which Marjorie Castillain was one; and Lina thought too, what Lady Athelston loved to think, that Marjorie was determined to show to Sir Neil how constantly he was in her thoughts, and what a pleasure it was to her to be in his society. And to Colonel Stuart she was hotly and impatiently defiant; only now and then a glimpse of saddened regret would creep into the restless eyes after some more than usually willful reply.

And he—always courteous, yet with a certain proud independence of her provocations, which sat wonderfully well upon him in his high-bred calmness—treated her just as no one else treated her; fully, keenly appreciating her humor, as Marjorie herself knew; feeling the wholesome freshness of every one of her original or generous thoughts; seeing clearly all the good in her; yet always alive to her faults, more alive to them even than Louisa was, only so very differently! And Marjorie always knew that these faults of hers—so many that, as she told Lina, she had often tried in vain to count them during a whole morning—hurt him as they hurt no one else; hurt him just because he was good himself. And yet—and yet it was to him she always showed these faults most glaringly. It was from him she hid the few good qualities which she possessed. And it was too late now to change it all.

"Will you play to us, Marjorie dear?" asked Lady Athelston.

It was the request which the girl always expected and complied with at once; for the knowledge that Lady Athelston could not hear a note, and only asked because she knew how fond Neil was of the light, gay music which Marjorie always accorded him, did not make her hesitate for a moment. But to-night she rose very slowly, glancing comically the while into all the expectant faces.

"What shall I play?" she asked, looking at no one now; standing, tall and lithe and graceful, at the piano, with idle hands—"grave or gay?"

"Gay, of course," responded Neil, promptly.

"Grave," said Colonel Stuart, laughing.

"Conflicting orders, rather," mused Marjorie. "Please don't make any other choice, Miss Chester. Neil, you said gay, didn't you? All right; I always do what you ask me. What shall it be?"

"'Tom and Jerry.'"

She sat down slowly, and her face was hidden from them. Lina was listening for the quick, gay old tune she knew so well; but Marjorie had played for several minutes before she recognized it, so oddly was it played, with such curious pathos. Lina could hardly believe her ears. Was it "Tom and Jerry"—that slow, sad air? Yes; there was no mistake. Through the rich, slow chords and mournful harmonies ran the old melody distinctly; and yet such a wonderful and touching strain was it all, that—even though she fought with them—great, slow tears rose in her eyes.

"You chose 'Tom and Jerry,' and I like playing what you choose," remarked Marjorie, rising with an air of comical satisfaction; yet Lina fancied that on her face, too, there had been a gravity which she found it hard to chase away.

"Do you call that gay?" asked Neil.

"You did," she answered, in a quiet tone, while a laugh stole into Colonel Stuart's eyes, though he was not looking at her—a laugh that was glad and surprised.

"I wonder whether the pony-carriage is come for me," surmised Marjorie, aloud, but without addressing any one in particular. "I should be glad to think that the old folks at home would remember me sufficiently to place that antiquated vehicle at my disposal. I never was brought up to expect any thing superior to that."

"There are plenty of carriages here at your disposal, Marjorie," Neil said. "And I expect Louisa's remembering you depends a good deal on whether Jelfrey is still with her. Have they separated yet, think you?"

"She will just now," spoke Marjorie, musingly, as she glanced at the clock, "be warbling 'They wreathed my brow with gems of light.' If they did, they'd never be such idiots as to do it again, that's a comfort. And Mr. Jelfrey will presently burst into song, and entreat her to 'Oh, breathe those thrilling notes again!' which you'd naturally think meant an *encore*, but it doesn't."

"I wonder whether Mr. Castillain and your sister have any idea what you call them," said Colonel Stuart.

"Do you mean the 'Old Folks at Home?'" echoed Neil, laughing. "Why, of course they have. We all have the satisfaction of knowing that Marjorie calls us nothing worse in our absence than in our presence."

"A satisfaction, indeed!" assented the colonel, quietly.

"Yet at home they don't appreciate even that noble quality of mine," returned Marjorie, determined not to show any displeasure at his words. "It does not cause them to idolize me in the slightest—not as Emily Jorden, for instance, is idolized."

"Yet you are nicer than Emily, are you not?" inquired Neil, detecting nothing of earnestness below the girl's jesting words.

"Far, far nicer," answered Marjorie, with pathos; "even Louisa would own that: and if any one could deny it, she would."

"She does not love Miss Jorden overmuch, owing to Emily's little narratives of Jelfrey's imagined devotion to her."

"Hush, Neil!" interrupted Marjorie. "You've no business to encroach on our prerogatives. Women may say these things of each other, but we don't give the right to you."

"Then it is a woman's prerogative," asked the colonel, "to make her sister's feelings a subject of laughter with others, in her absence?"

"If Louisa *will* wear her heart on her sleeve," Marjorie said, coolly, as she rose, "it is to be expected from a well-trained daw that he will peck at it."

"However wrong the thing may be, I do not expect you to own to its being so," returned Colonel Stuart, a little sternly.

"No," she answered, "I could not do any thing so silly; I think too well of myself. My sin is self-love, Colonel Stuart, as especially opposed to my father's sin of self-neglect, and Shakspeare says that mine is not so vile as his. So I console myself. Oh, Miss Chester, you would have laughed if you had seen the squire yesterday! This sort of way—look! In his spectacles, with an apron on, sweeping his study himself—study? bah! I call it his cash-box—afraid of letting a servant in, because there were a few shillings lying about; stepping after the broom in this sort of way. I should like Mr. Spendir to have sketched the little scene."

Though none of the others could help listening, and laughing heartily at Marjorie's face and attitude as she mimicked her father with the broom, Colonel Stuart had turned away where he could not see her, no sign of a smile on his face.

"Lina," cried Marjorie, impulsively, when the two girls were upstairs together—"Lina."

And then she kissed her with a long, long earnest kiss. A little understanding the longing and the regret and the self-reproach which called for sympathy in Marjorie's eyes—no trace of mischief lurking in them now—Lina put her arms softly about her, and whispered that she thanked her for calling her by that name.

"I can not call you by any thing else again," Marjorie said, her lips twitching. "Oh, I wish—I wish I could be like you!"

"No, no!" cried Lina, eagerly.

"Like you—just like you; and then this—this miserable anger with myself could never be."

"You said one day that we could not judge of one another's pain," said Lina, softly.

"No, we can not; but none that you could bear could be just this sort of pain; and—and I hope and trust that you have none," she added, with sudden, regretful tenderness. "There, mine is gone now for to-night."

Marjorie had said good-bye cheerfully, and now sat in the shabby phaeton, wrapped up to the lips in a great red shawl; Colonel Stuart and Sir Neil stood beside her in the dusk of the spring night, the lamp-light from the hall-door just touching them.

"Shall I drive you, Miss Marjorie," the colonel asked, "and send your servant on my horse?"

"I think I feel pretty good now," she answered, with quiet unconcern. "Further lecturing may undo it; so good-night. Drive quickly, James."

But James could not help its being half an hour's drive; and through all that time big tears fell ceaselessly from Marjorie's eyes; fell slowly, too, as only those tears fall that are bravely struggled with in solitary pain.

CHAPTER VIII.

JELFREY'S TACTICS.

Colonel Stuart and his sister were sitting alone after their late dinner. Little Jack was in bed, and Mr. Jelfrey out.

"He must be at Hawkedale," Mrs. Esdaile said. "He would hardly be walking or riding this wet evening. It is always a relief to me, Alick, when he is out."

"Yet you can not tell me why," remarked her brother, smiling.

"No. I can not even tell myself; but I am relieved to be without him. I really dislike him; while I can not understand the reason any more than I can prevent the feeling."

"The only tangible charge you ever bring against him, Adelaide," said the colonel, "is his daring to aspire to—to a close friendship with your friends."

"What right has he to woo a Castillain?" returned Mrs. Esdaile, hotly. "But it is not that only; I want to know how he dare pretend to woo Louisa, when he has set his heart on Marjorie! Marjorie, indeed!"

"Marjorie does not see it, I suppose?"

"See it!" repeated Mrs. Esdaile, laughing in spite of her spleen. "Is there any thing at all like a joke which Marjorie does not see?"

"And you think this very like a joke, eh?" questioned the colonel, his voice lighter than it had been a few minutes before.

"Very, indeed; and would be, even if Marjorie were not a girl of high descent and heir to one hundred thousand pounds—would be, if there were no such thing in the way as a prior engagement to Sir Neil Athelston."

"I wonder when that marriage is to take place? Do you ever hear of it, Adelaide?"

"Not as being fixed for any particular date; but I hear of it often," she answered. "Lady Athelston is fond enough of talking about it. What a day of schemes accomplished and hopes realized it will be for her! won't it, Alick?"

"What were we speaking of before? Oh! Jelfrey. Now, much as you dislike him, Adelaide, you must own he is a gentleman."

"It depends a good deal on one's translation of the word," she said. "I fear, if he is a specimen, you are not of the true metal, Alick. But, still," she added, quickly, "I will own he is what people call gentlemanly. I never saw any one who could make himself more irresistibly agreeable; nor one who could oftener make you agree with him in spite of your better sense and judgment."

"You are going too deep for me, dear," put in the colonel, laughing.

"Nonsense! It's only because you are so determined not to speak against any one. It is so like you, Alick. Well, I'll say no more than this: I wish he were not admitted to be the friend of Neil Athelston. Sir Neil is bad enough, perhaps, by nature; but I know that every hour spent with Eustace Jelfrey makes him a worse man. And I wish the period of his engagement for little Jack were over. I can not bear to break it—I mean I can not bear to ask you to break it."

"No, dear; we engaged him for two years, and it is but just to treat him (in our minds, of course, I mean; there is no fear of your not do-

ing it other ways) as generously as we can for that time. Jack is so continually with you, and so young, that no influence, such as you dread for Sir Neil, could injure him. And Jelfrey is really an excellent teacher, as far as we can judge."

The "excellent teacher," with his head bent, and his hat low over his eyes, was making his way just then along Nether Lane, in the rain and the darkness, walking from the town toward the two cottages which stood half-way to High Athelston. The overbranching trees only extended so far as the lane skirted the park, so that from Churchill to the cottages the road was open to the sky. Jelfrey wished to-night that it had not been so; and yet he cared nothing for the swift, light rain which fell upon him unhindered.

He passed the first cottage, only just glancing at the closed door and shuttered window; then he trod with cautious quietness up the other garden-path, and rapped at the door of Mrs. Cheere's quiet, orderly little house. A tall woman, with a faded face and fierce, sharp eyes, opened it to him only a little way.

"What is it?" she asked, tartly.

Jelfrey pushed back his wet hat. He had a winning smile and a pleasant voice; and the irresistible force of both of these was brought to bear upon Dorcas.

"Will you kindly tell me if Mr. Spendir lives here?"

"Lives here! No, thank God, he does *not!*" And the door was shut abruptly in Mr. Jelfrey's face.

The sharp retort and sudden repulse took his breath away; but he was not one to be nonplused for many minutes at a time. Dorcas had hardly settled herself to her work again, when he summoned her with another rap; and, without waiting to see whether she would answer it or not, he softly opened the door, and entered the room with his hat in his hand.

"If you will allow me, I shall be very glad to shelter here for a few minutes," he said, courteously. "It is raining heavily, and I have no umbrella. Will you allow me?"

"The rain off your hat's falling all about the carpet. Give it to me to take into the kitchen," remarked Dorcas, shortly.

He gave it, with a bland apology for troubling her, and then sat down with the utmost ease in the prim parlor.

"There's no objection to your sheltering," said Dorcas, looking rather favorably upon him when she returned, but still evidently resenting some injury which she felt rankling; "but I thought you said you wanted that man next door. Shame it is, too, that he *should* be next door."

"Oh no, I do not want him," smiled Jelfrey, pleasantly; "I only needed shelter; and, as I happened to know his name, I thought it better to ask him instead of troubling you."

"Never mind the trouble," muttered Dorcas, gruffly. "I suppose," she continued with intense acrimony, "he could have given you shelter, but I don't suppose there's any thing else he could have given you."

"Poor, I understand," put in Jelfrey, in a tone of encouragement.

"Poor! Ugh, I've seen poor folks often enough to know them by sight, but that's not his disease. He's a born miser. And, I can tell you, a half-mad miser, forever singing and making noises with fiddles and things; and laughing and knocking about, is not just the right sort of neighbor for a quiet, orderly woman."

"Indeed he is not," assented Jelfrey, readily, suppressing the smile which Dorcas's description warranted. "He must indeed be, as you say, half mad. I'm sorry for his child."

"Sorry for him?" echoed Dorcas, shrilly; "he's not the one to be sorry for. It's more natural to be sorry for those he worrits and torments to death."

"I almost wonder that Sir Neil Athelston let Colonel Stuart have the cottage for them," said Jelfrey, with intense sympathy; "he might have thought how unpleasant it would be for you."

"He might have thought — yes," returned Dorcas, icily, "but he did not. People like him don't think much. Thinking for others doesn't generally go with money."

Jelfrey bent his face a little. His smile was irrepressible, but he would not let her see it.

"But your neighbor, on the contrary, has no money, and he does not seem to think for others either."

"Thinking for others doesn't generally go with miserliness," retorted Dorcas, stiffly.

A thought of Marjorie Castillain flashed into Jelfrey's mind—of Marjorie and of some others who were kind to this isolated woman—and an ironical thought followed, classing all gratitude with this gratitude. But no words escaped him but words of interest and sympathy. So he led her on gradually to tell him all she could of the life which those two passed in the next cottage. Hungrily he listened to all she said, but so easily that he only seemed to be enjoying her company, not what she told him. And Dorcas felt the charm of his presence, as others had felt it often and often during the years of his manhood.

"And I've known *ladies* come to the cottage, too," she concluded, with a relish, "and one came in the dark, and listened outside his door."

"Perhaps too bashful to go in and get her portrait taken for a few shillings," said Jelfrey, with a charitable smile, and a well-concealed eagerness in his voice.

Dorcas sniffed in cool disdain.

"I was trying to drop asleep," she said, resenting even the retrospect, "but it was as good not try as try, with that fearful noise just through these thin walls; more like bagpipes than any thing else, only worse. So I got up to look out of my room window. Then I saw her, though I dare say she thought herself hidden in the dark. There was a bit of light from his window, and I saw her."

"Young, I suppose?" asked the tutor, pleasantly.

But Dorcas was hazy on this point, and did not choose to show that she was, so she passed the question by with lofty unconcern.

"If I'd been down here," she resumed, "and if she'd gone into his house, which I don't think she'd the honesty to do, I should have known what she wanted. The wall in that cupboard's thin enough for that, thin enough to give me the earache pretty often."

Under Jelfrey's white hand there lay a heap of periodicals on the little round-table. His eyes seemed to be tracing the letters on the thin paper covers; but no words printed there could

have brought into them that sudden flash of satisfaction.

"I hope the thin walls do not belong to your usual sitting-room?" he inquired, with anxious sympathy.

"Usual sitting-room or unusual sitting-room," retorted Dorcas, "the walls are thin; and that's enough to have turned me out of this house years ago, if I hadn't been determined to bear it."

If Jelfrey's thoughts had not been too much engrossed by other things, he might have fancied Dorcas rather at a loss to explain her reason for not being turned out by the thin walls.

"That is the closet, I fear," he said, pointing to a door opposite him.

"Yes, that's it," replied Dorcas, with resignation; "and inside that closet I could hear, if I liked, every word of the nonsense those two talk."

"If you had not told me this yourself," said Jelfrey, with great tact, "I should never have been able to believe it. Have you really never spoken to Sir Neil about it?"

"It is not often that Sir Neil Athelston troubles me with opportunities of speaking to him about any thing," she answered, viciously.

"I should like to mention it to him, if you would allow me," said Jelfrey, rising. "I do not ask you to show me the place, but—"

"Oh, you can see it," said Mrs. Cheere, a little mollified by his evident sympathy. "There's nothing secret in any of my cupboards."

With the door shut the closet would have been in darkness, but she did not of course offer to shut it upon her visitor. He stood within for a few minutes, his head against the wall; then he stepped lightly into the room again, and the lips that had been pressed together for that little time with cunning cruelty were smiling now.

"I think that no landlord should suffer such walls as those to stand," he said, shaking his head sympathetically; "and if you will give me permission, I will remind Sir Neil of it. But I would not he should think you have been complaining; so I will mention it casually, as if I had accidentally heard of or discovered it. You had better not speak of this visit at all—neither will I—to any one. Miss Marjorie Castillain is fond of coming to see you, I know," he added, suavely. "Does she know how the sounds disturb you?"

"I've told her, but she's harum-scarum; and I don't believe she heeds it."

"She is young and giddy, true; and would have forgotten it, I dare say."

A generous excuse, truly, from his lips!

"And Miss Marjorie sometimes comes to see your next-door neighbor?" he went on, with apparent indifference.

"Yes, sometimes; and *she* don't want her portrait, I know."

"Comes as a friend," murmured Jelfrey, with a hot rush of color in his face, though his cool and easy kindliness did not forsake him. "You have a handsome book here," he went on, turning over the leaves of the paper-covered books on the round-table. 'History of England,' I see, in monthly parts, and illustrated. How very nice!"

"Yes, it's a handsome book," rejoined Dorcas, with stately pride, "and interesting. It's a handsome price, too—two shillings a month! I began to take it in when my little girl was a baby, and stopped when—she was lost; so I haven't got the end. I don't care about the end; unless she ever comes and wants it."

"Very nice—very nice," muttered Jelfrey, turning the pages over and over, and wondering how Dorcas had found its interest when none of the leaves were cut; wondering whether any one could be found who would wade through all that close small print and dry matter; and wondering, too, whether the motive for issuing such an endless periodical must not have been to insure the author a life-annuity. "Of course, you never lend such a book as this?" he suggested; "else—"

"Lend it! No, indeed!" cried Dorcas.

"But may I ask you," returned Jelfrey, going to the point at once, "to let me sometimes just drop in and look over a few pages? I will be very careful of the work—a handsome and valuable work, indeed—and be very much obliged to you for the privilege."

"Not to take it from this table," explained Dorcas.

"No, I will not; and it will never be but for a few minutes at a time."

"Oh! you're welcome to that," she said, relaxing a little of her normal rigidity; "but you'll take the chance of finding me engaged in the kitchen."

Jelfrey's eyes brightened suddenly, and his words of acknowledgment were airy in their gladness.

"Will you promise," he entreated, "never to let my coming disturb you at all? Just treat me, when I come, as if I were a piece of furniture, or as if I were not here at all. I shall be so glad if you will promise this."

Dorcas promised, gruffly enough. And then the tutor suddenly found that the rain had abated sufficiently for him to venture forth. He gave her a friendly hand-shake and further thanks; then went out again into the night and the rain and the darkness.

And as he walked back very rapidly toward Churchill, he laughed once or twice to himself, wet as he was, thinking how dexterously he had prepared for the work that lay before him—the crafty, cruel work which his hand and heart were skilled to do and to design.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MOUNTAIN TARN.

MAY, June, July—the summer months have come and gone. A few hours more, and August, too, will have smiled her parting smile, and hidden her blooming, beautiful face. But in the light and warmth of this golden smile of hers there are enjoyment and festivity among the Highshire hills. Her last glance has to fall upon merry faces lingering among the flowers in the valley; and the music of her soft farewell—whispered among the leaves—is to mingle with the clear and jubilant young voices on the hill-side. But, before we join them there, in the beauty of the August afternoon, let us look back a little, and see how these summer months have sped.

Lady Athelston has grown fond of her companion now; yet in such thralldom is she still to

her maid Fletcher that she hides this fondness carefully, even from the girl herself. Always obliged to lean upon some one, Lady Athelston finds it pleasantest to lean upon Miss Chester, who is always so calm, so wise, so gentle; always knows exactly the right thing to do, and never makes a fuss about doing it.

Lady Athelston dislikes a fuss: if there be one thing capable of rousing in her mind a feeling vigorous enough to be called hate, then Lady Athelston hates a fuss. Fletcher, getting often now excited in her jealousy of Miss Chester, forgets this, and fusses in her duties; therefore, day by day, is Fletcher undermining her own influence; while Lina—always patient, always self-forgetful, always alive to Lady Athelston's wants and wishes, and always a true lady—is, day by day, as surely increasing and intensifying hers.

Lina thinks nothing of this. Just as she is perfectly unconscious how her earnest thoughtfulness and simple woman's wisdom supply all the deficiencies of the lady she calls her mistress (and the while hides that they do so), so she is unconscious with what true bravery and humility she walks that solitary path which she has chosen. She only knows that she is trying to do all she has undertaken to do, leaning on other strength than her own; and that the task is a strangely heavy one, in spite of all.

At first she thought she knew the only reason of this heaviness, and that it would vanish—at any rate, for a time—when she and Lady Athelston were alone. So she looked forward to the time when Sir Neil would be in London. But when he went, the load, though lessened, was not taken from her; and she knew then that this pressing, overwhelming shadow of great, indefinable fear could never leave her, either while she lived in Sir Neil Athelston's house, or while the artist remained in that cottage near. Yet now that she knew he did so, her one strong reason for remaining was stronger tenfold than it had ever been.

Sir Neil Athelston had not staid long in London. In the very height of the season, from the very heart of its attractions, he had returned to High Athelston, vouchsafing only the rather novel explanation that he had been "bored to death." His mother did not often trouble herself now to spend a season in London, and she rejoiced, with an utterly childish delight, to think that he had found the great house in town too dreary without her.

"Foolish boy," she said complacently to Lina. "He really had no other reason for coming back, but that his old mother was here, and not there."

And Lina, whose eyes had been proud and hot and angry ever since she and Lady Athelston had left the dining-room, where Sir Neil had whispered another reason to her even in his deaf mother's presence, was grateful that the words were not put as a question.

This was in May, and now she looked on to the time when she and Lady Athelston were to go to the sea-side together. In July they went, but at the last moment Sir Neil changed all his plans, and took them.

"Fickle and uncertain as ever," his mother said, with a smile of pride and pleasure.

To Lina this sea-side life was worse than the life at High Athelston. Here Sir Neil seemed to be able to take entire possession of her the greater part of every day. There were ladies there who knew him, and welcomed him among them; yet he was always disengaged to walk with Lina, and could always manage that his mother should think him the same dutiful son, yet should not be able to interfere, in any way, with his selfish pleasures. There were gentlemen there who sought him, evidently accustomed to his prompt participation in any amusement which might be the fancy of the hour; yet he was always at liberty to ride, or drive, or sail with Lina, and no refusal or rebuff of hers daunted him, or stayed him. And what the world said, or what it thought, had as little weight with him as had the whisperings of a conscience which could not quite forget that there was such a name in the wide world as Marjorie Castillain.

"What's the use of caring what's said about you?" laughed Neil, rather enjoying the banter of the young men with whom he was playing billiards. "You may fret yourself to a shadow in no time, if you care what the world says. I never did, and never shall."

"Evidently," one of his companions answered, coolly; "but I should not like to be talked about quite as you are, Athelston."

"Oh, it's no more painful when you're used to it than skinning is to an eel. What does the mighty world say now?"

"Much," laughed a young man, looking up slowly from the cue he was chalking. "It says Sir Neil Athelston is paying his mother's companion a ridiculous amount of attention, just to spite Lady Helen Burton, who (it knows, of course, why shouldn't it?) has come from Highshire on purpose to breathe his atmosphere here. And it says that she is very absurd to be provoked by him, because he is an engaged man, and therefore an ineligible member of society. And it says that Lady Athelston ought to put a stop to such things. And it says that Miss Chester, of course, will break her heart when her mistress's son turns his fancy elsewhere. And it says that she must be a designing little hypocrite. Thus the mighty world."

"And it never says," cried a very young man, joining in the conversation, radiant after a fluke, "that, if she's not the most beautiful girl here, there's no other more beautiful. No; catch it saying that!"

"Nor does it say another thing," added the first speaker, coldly, "that if Miss Castillain, of Hawkedale, had a brother, Sir Neil Athelston's behavior here would be a little less unguarded, and Miss Chester's fair fame unbreathed upon by the idle, scandal-loving tongues which make this world you talk of."

"I say," interposed Neil, looking fully and angrily into his companion's face, while the quick color dyed his own, "don't you know where to stop?"

"It would not signify so much," was the deliberate answer, "if the young lady did not live under your own roof, and under your own protection, as it were. Why, man, can't you see the wrong you do to her, as well as to Miss Castillain?"

But Neil, irresistibly tickled by the seriousness so out of place in that gay scene, only joined the others in a hearty laugh.

"Nothing goes deep enough even to put him out of temper," muttered the gentleman who had

spoken last, as he took his place at the table, "and nothing ever will."

So the world said what it chose, and Sir Neil, unmoved, went on his selfish way. There was another relief to which Lina could look forward after their return to High Athelston, and this was Sir Neil's visit, in the grouse season, to his shooting-box in Scotland. This came and went; a few days of rest and quiet, and then he was back again, and the house was filled with the old gayety and cruelty and unrest.

To another rest Lina was looking forward now. This was the expectation of a houseful of visitors for September. They were most of them to arrive on the evening of the last day of August, to meet at an eight-o'clock dinner; and before this dinner, Sir Neil Athelston had determined to have a few hours of—for him—very novel enjoyment. "Rustic felicity," as he called it, with his ironical, good-humored laugh. "All drinking tea in the valley, you know, Miss Chester, like a Sunday-school; and a real kettle and fire to improve the drama, like the Crummles's pump and tubs. What do you say to my highly original idea?"

Lina said nothing but that original ideas were always to be welcomed. But even Neil could see how little pleasure the thought gave her when he proposed it, and how her light words and fleeting smile only covered a thorough and entire indifference. When Lady Athelston had arranged, however, that the guests from their own neighborhood, who were to stay at High Athelston with those from a distance, should be asked to join in this tea at the water-fall, and drive home with them in time for dinner, Lina looked forward with more pleasure to the afternoon. Marjorie Castillain would be among them; and these few months had taught Lina how to value this girl's generous, willful friendship. True, Louisa would be there as well as her sister—and Louisa had by no means taught Miss Chester to value *her* friendship; on the contrary, she had taught her simply to dread and avoid all intercourse with her; but Lina lost sight of that in the pleasure of the other anticipation.

Then, Colonel Stuart would come too; and, even if Mr. Jelfrey were invited with him (as he probably would be, because Sir Neil liked him; and because, as he was known in the neighborhood to be a gentleman by birth, and a clever and attractive one, it pretty generally chanced that he was invited everywhere), it was never the same pain to Lina to meet him when the colonel was present.

So they all met, gayly and pleasantly, just within the valley gate; and, descending from the carriages which had brought them, prepared to walk up to the water-fall, following the winding of the glistening little stream which curved and frolicked hither and thither on the soft, bright turf; all walking, at least, except Lady Athelston, and Lina, who drove the pony-carriage on through the valley.

Slowly they went along in the August sunshine, the walking party now and then keeping up with them, now and then falling behind, and now and then hastening laughingly on. "As merry a party," Lina thought, looking on from her low cushioned seat, "as ever the great, sunny hills looked down upon." And as she caught glimpses of the different faces, her thoughts went back—as thoughts have a habit of doing occasionally—to the first time she had seen them; and she wondered how far her first impressions had proved true ones. "Nearly in every case," she said to herself.

The knowledge of them which this summer had given her had hardly changed her opinion in the slightest degree, where she had been able to form an opinion at all. Had not Miss Castillain always shown just the same cold suspicion and hard mistrust of her as she had read in her greeting on that first day? And had not Marjorie been always just as friendly, as amusing, and as incomprehensible as she had been during that unexpected call which she had made on the girl who came a stranger among them? Mr. Castillain, eccentric and narrow-minded as he was, had always been jocundly patronizing to Lina, just as he had been on their first introduction.

Then Colonel Stuart, was he not always courteous, and kind, and helpful? From him, Lina's eyes wandered to Eustace Jelfrey, and a shadow clouded them. Why was the power placed in his hands making her life miserable?—yet why was it so hard to tell how he did it? Every word he uttered to her—sarcastic and supercilious to her ear, polite and kind to the ears of others—made her heart beat with pain and anger; yet, unless he lied to her, he was thinking always of her happiness and welfare, and using his great influence with Sir Neil Athelston, to persuade him to desist in those eager, ceaseless attentions, which were an insult offered now from him to his mother's companion.

This, Mr. Jelfrey made her believe when he was in her presence, though strong within her all the time was the consciousness that she never disliked Sir Neil so thoroughly as when he was acting under the tutor's influence, and that Lady Athelston was never so hard and selfish as when she, too, had been in his society—no, not even Louisa Castillain could make her quite so unfeeling and so exacting.

"Yes, nearly in every case my first impressions have proved true ones," Lina said to herself, glancing with unconscious wistfulness into her companion's face, as if that were the exception only. "I think, though, that I never did have any definite impression there," she thought; "the mother and the son were too much alike for me to care. Are such natures capable of any thing beyond self-indulgence and self-love, I wonder?"

"What a handsome couple Sir Neil and Marjorie make!" spoke Lady Athelston, suddenly breaking in upon this thought; and Lina nodded with her bright, assenting smile. She was always ready, eagerly ready, to class those two together.

"Not that Marjorie is quite to be compared with my son in point of good looks," continued Lady Athelston, with slow unctuousness; "but, then, there are other things about her which compensate for want of real beauty. Ah! Mr. Jelfrey, have they let you off to join the old lady? Miss Chester and I were just remarking how admirably my son and Miss Castillain suit each other; and how, though she has no real beauty, she has other things which compensate. For instance, her figure; now what figure do you gentlemen pronounce her to be?"

Marjorie, a hundred yards in front, was crossing the sunny little stream on the stepping-stones.

Neil, on the other side, waited for her, his offered hand unheeded, his dissatisfied eyes fixed upon the carriage behind. Watching them intently, Jelfrey answered, with a smile,

"Exquisite! There can be but one voice among us on that point, Lady Athelston."

"Though Louisa's face is so much more regular, I think Marjorie carries away the palm. She always makes a greater sensation in society, as you may say; doesn't she, Miss Chester?" inquired Lady Athelston, always requiring her own opinions indorsed, and eager for praise of Marjorie, because she was to be Neil's wife. "I must not ask you, I suppose, Mr. Jelfrey. It would not be fair to tempt you to say that Marjorie has the more winning face."

Eustace Jelfrey's lips curled with a sudden involuntary scorn; his eyes for a moment flashed with savage jealousy; then he said, coolly, with a smile which was bestowed on Lina as well as on Lady Athelston,

"Miss Castillain's face is classically handsome; Miss Marjorie's greatest admirer could not say so of hers."

And Lina, listening to the sarcastic words, turned her eyes from the false, handsome face with a feeling of real fear.

"Pull up, Miss Chester," cried Sir Neil, standing near the water-fall, and motioning the groom to the ponies' heads as they came up to him, "this is the place."

"'This is the place, stand still, my steed,'" quoted Marjorie, sauntering round to Lina's side of the phaeton. "Did you ever see two of the gold-fish at High Athelston walking about the croquet-ground, Miss Chester, trying to arrange the hoops?"

"Not yet," laughed Lina.

"I feared not; but, at any rate, I can show you a very similar sight up above; namely, the twin canaries arranging tea *al fresco*, and overwhelmed by the responsibility of a disjointed fire and an uncertain kettle. Neil is going to help them when he has landed his mother; and while they exercise their united skill, let us walk a little."

Neil came up to them eagerly.

"You are almost a stranger among the hills, Miss Chester," he said; "so come and let me show you the chief points of interest before tea."

"Then *I* must go and help Colonel Stuart and Mr. Jorden," said Marjorie, coolly.

"That's a hit, eh, Marjorie?" laughed Neil, laying his hand lightly on her shoulder. "I must take the hint conveyed in it. Well, go where you will, and I'll do what I've got to do here; but tell me where I shall find you presently."

"We will go over the hills there beyond the fall," said Marjorie, "and come back by the pool."

"All right," rejoined Sir Neil; "don't join any other party."

"I almost believe," remarked Marjorie, as the two girls strolled on, "that this is going to be quite a jolly little picnic. And it is not very often, is it, Lina, that those things which are purposely arranged to give pleasure do give it? It seems to me that you have only just to anticipate a thing for it to turn out a disappointing, lowering, depressing failure. Is that your experience too?"

"I don't often look forward to any great enjoyment," returned Lina; "I have not for many years."

One swift glance, tender and pitiful, Marjorie gave into the beautiful white face beside her, then laughed.

"Did not Sir Neil look handsome and angry when I sent him off? I wonder whether he is going to enjoy his picnic."

"I think we all intend to do so," Lina answered, smiling. "I hope you do not prognosticate disappointment for us all, Miss Castillain."

"Make haste," interrupted Marjorie, lowering her voice; "I am afraid of—Mr. Jelfrey joining us."

"It is Colonel Stuart's step behind us," corrected Lina; "but he is only going to help Miss Jorden up the steep."

"Oh," replied Marjorie, with a laugh that stifled a quick breath of relief, and yet with a deepening of odd shadows in her eyes, "if it is Colonel Stuart, we need not fear. He will not care to worry us, nor worry to himself by overtaking us. Make haste!"

So, quickly and happily they went on, climbing past the fall, and on up the steep hill-side. Then they turned to make their way down into the valley again, past the tarn that lay so still and white below the slope.

"It looks like a harmless and rather picturesque little mountain lake, doesn't it?" asked Miss Castillain, as they neared it; "but you have no idea, Lina, of its horrible treachery. It was originally the shaft of a mine—I can not tell whether an exhausted one or a failure, for it certainly was never worked within my memory—but gradually the water filled it, and then spread, till now, all round, it touches the sloping banks quite gently, doesn't it, as if it had no horrible unsounded depth in its centre? I don't like the place; I never did, though I seldom say so, because the idea would only be called a stupid fancy. But, Lina, I have such a shuddering dislike for any thing that is—oh! I hardly know what I mean—any thing that is trustworthy only on the surface; that isn't what it seems to be. Do you understand?"

She looked round into her companion's face as she spoke, and seeing it, there came upon her a great regret for those words, which had been uttered without a thought beyond their present meaning, yet had the power to pierce so keenly.

"Yes," she resumed, not apparently having noticed any thing of this, "a place, I mean, in which life may be lost while you never suspect it possible—precipices, and lakes, and glaciers, and that sort of thing," added Marjorie, at random. "But this water does look its character a little, doesn't it?"

"It is a solitary and gloomy place, even on this summer's day," said Lina, as they stood on the brink, and looked far down into the water; "gloomy even with the sunbeams on its surface, and the flowers growing to its very edge. Then, what must it be in the winter-time? Think of it in the haunted dusk of a December afternoon!"

"Or November. November is the month I hate. Oh, I would not be here in the gloomy dusk of a November day," said Marjorie, with a laughing shudder, "for a thousand pounds. Would you?"

"For a thousand pounds," echoed Lina, with a strange tone of pain in her low voice, "indeed—indeed I would."

"Mercenary," laughed Marjorie, "what a good thing! That is one of the Castillain virtues, and I feared you did not possess it. When they tell me of Mr. Spendir's miserliness, you don't know how I feel drawn to him. Ah, talk of an angel, and you hear the flutter of wings. There is Mr. Spendir, I believe; sketching, is he? Oh, what an object!"

Lina's eyes followed Miss Castillain's rapidly and eagerly, and saw the artist—his head enveloped in a large yellow silk handkerchief—bent busily over his work.

"Come," said Marjorie, noticing nothing of Lina's quickened breath, "and see what he is doing."

Fitz Spendir looked up slowly from his sketching-board as the girls advanced; then rose, his handsome, sunburned face looking out from the yellow handkerchief.

"Why do you wear it, Mr. Spendir?" asked Marjorie, looking at it with intense inquisitiveness in her big, grave eyes.

"I wear it to keep off the flies," said Fitz, coloring a little through the bronze skin, but with no vestige of shamefacedness. "Being yellow, Miss Castillain, it does not interfere with the colors if it slips over my eyes. An odd feature in the landscape, am I not?"

"About the only earnest or employed figure among us all," said Marjorie, with a gentleness for which Lina thanked her in her heart; "so you ought to make an odd feature in the landscape. Please go on sketching, Mr. Spendir, while we stay here on the moss. Isn't it beautiful? The tiny white butterflies skimming over the heather might be snow-flakes, mightn't they, Lina? I shall never have courage to go back, for it seems as if my tread would crush a hundred."

"The instinct of self-preservation is too strong within them," said Lina, laughing a little nervously as she stood.

"An instinct common to us all," put in Fitz, quietly, as he went on with his work. "I wish the instinct included preservation of other things besides life."

Lina was looking down upon him, a long, sad questioning in her eyes.

"It does," she said; "only we are rash and—and forgetful, and do not follow it."

Something in the tone made Marjorie silent for a few minutes, wondering. As she stood so, looking, not down upon the sketch below her, but away among the shadows of the firs which stood above the tarn, a group from the valley below came up the little path among the fern and heather, only turning aside to the pool when they suddenly caught sight of the girls and the artist beside it.

"Oh, Marjorie!" cried Emily Jorden, clinging to her with a pretty little affectation of fear, "why did you come here? We never come here when we picnic; it is so very dreadfully gloomy!"

"Awfully gloomy!" assented Marjorie, with eyes so bright and laughing that Lina doubted whether she could really have uttered those words about the lake only a few minutes before. "I should feel quite frightened, only that Mr. Jelfrey looks so brave, and Sir Neil is so big, and Mr. Spendir is sure to be accustomed to mountain horrors, and Colonel Stuart has been in battle, and Mr. Jorden is, by his cloth, made impervious. So," continued Marjorie, "I don't feel so greatly alarmed as I might under other circumstances."

"But don't you really think it dismal?" asked Emily, raising her eyes innocently, with that peculiar glance which is intended for one person and directed to another.

"I remember," said Marjorie, particularly addressing the artist as they all stood together beside the pool—"I remember well a silent little lake in the Scilly Islands, which the sight of still and shadowy water always recalls to me, and which was something to make one tremble, indeed. We had to make our way to it on our hands and knees, as it were, along a cavern that seemed endless. Then we came upon it—a high, vaulted space, occupied by a dark, still sheet of water. The guide stuck candles all around us on the slimy walls; and can you judge of the effect of these, and of those we carried, when we embarked upon it, rowing on until it was too narrow for us to pass? The reflection in the jetty-black water, and the awful, silent gloom of the place, made my hair really rise, I believe, as it rises in novels. The whole scene—the motionless water, dark as death, the weird lights, the slowly moving boat, could be like nothing but the entrance to Hades. Very few people go to the Scilly Isles," added Marjorie, as if glad to dismiss the recollection, "else I would ask you if you knew the spot, Mr. Spendir."

The sunshine sparkled on the water before him; the birds flew twittering from the firs opposite; the dainty little white butterflies chased each other in and out of the shelter of the heather; but the artist's eyes saw nothing of this. They were dark and sad, with a far-seeing, inward look; and over them the low straight brows were drawn with pain.

"Miss Marjorie," said Colonel Stuart, answering quietly, as over his face there passed the sudden awakening of a great pity, "my remembrance of the islands has a brighter aspect than that. I can only recall the lake in the gardens of the abbey at Trescoe, with the islands in its centre—islands within islands—where tropical birds and flowers abound; where emus walk sedately under hedges of scarlet geranium fifteen feet high, and among rare ice-plants of more than one hundred different hues and forms."

Colonel Stuart—who had evidently been talking on for some purpose—stopped here, with a sudden movement, to help Lina Chester, for she had turned quickly away and begun to descend the path again.

"Lady Athelston will want me, I think, perhaps," she faltered, her lips twitching, and her eyes wide and miserable.

"We are all coming, Miss Chester," put in Sir Neil's high-bred, authoritative tones. "Wait one instant, please; I want Mr. Spendir to join us at tea. It's a practical joke of a meal," he went on, laughing. "Come, Spendir, we shall all be glad."

Sir Neil Athelston could be courteous enough when he chose, and he was courteous then. But the artist quietly refused. They were all urging him when Eustace Jelfrey and Miss Castillain came up to the pool beside them, standing nearer to it than had any of them.

"That's right," said Neil, waiting at Lina Chester's side; "Miss Jorden seemed to think there was something about the water which should make people avoid it."

"Haunted?" laughed Jelfrey.

With a sudden movement—half of terror, half of disgust—Lina started back; for, just as his shadow touched the water, a heavier one spread from edge to edge; and for a moment the sun's rays were swallowed, and the pool was black and treacherous as night. Only a minute, and the sun shone out again beyond the passing cloud; but the old look never came again to Lina's face through all that evening.

There was much laughter during tea, for it takes but little to provoke laughter over such a meal among the hills; with a great fire burning up against the ardent August sky, and requiring constant replenishing; and half a dozen gentlemen waiting, with a gay attempt at professional skill, and making the task as comical a one as possible. Every joke passes muster then, and laughter is bright and quick and ready to wait even upon a trifling jest, which would be scornfully ignored as too poor to provoke a smile in the very same society at home. But when the noisy meal was over, and the twin canaries—who had had nothing to do—were preparing to enjoy a quiet tea together in the background, the party separated; and then more than one of them wished that they could have gone straight from the cheerful meal away from the hills altogether.

"How beautiful it is!" Louisa Castillain said, looking up to where the sunshine lingered on the hill-tops, while the valley lay in shadow. But she was left to saunter with Lady Athelston only, and soon the beauty died out for her.

"Lovely!" murmured Emily Jorden, glancing coyly down into the chattering little stream which threaded its way through the moss, and touching with her parasol the glistening pebbles or shining leaves which lay below the rippling surface. But Colonel Stuart listened gravely to her rhapsody, and on the narrow pathway above (so far away that the sheep upon it looked like toys) Eustace Jelfrey and Marjorie Castillain were walking idly together. So very soon the loveliness died out for her.

Could it have died out more completely even if her ears had detected the passionate, jealous, hopeless love which Eustace Jelfrey tried in vain to hide as he talked to this girl?—a love that was cowardly in its despair, and threatening in its selfishness; a love which he strove to make her feel in every word and look of his, yet which he felt it would be ruin to him to confess.

And Marjorie walked beside him with utter, cold indifference, too proud to attempt an escape, and too fond of fun not to glean a certain amusement even from this *tête-à-tête*.

They had stopped for a minute on the height, and were looking round before they began their descent, when Jelfrey made a plunge over which he had hesitated for weeks. Inherent coward he must have been with all his daring, for his lips shook as he slowly uttered the words which he had rehearsed so many times, and on which he had built his last and most desperate hopes.

"I am glad to see Lady Athelston enjoy herself as she has done to-day, Miss Castillain," he said. "Though I know Miss Chester's behavior has worried her, she seems to be growing fond of her young companion. It certainly is not at all honorable in the girl to repay this undeserved kindness with treachery."

"Not at all," said Marjorie, placidly.

"For this whole afternoon, and for many days before," continued Jelfrey, his voice a little quicker and more eager, and his eyes turning from the distance with a keen, intent look at her as he spoke, "I have marked it with pain and regret. Lady Athelston's companion is using every art and every wile she possesses to win the love of Lady Athelston's son. Is that just, is that honorable, for one who is living, as it were, on her bounty?"

"Not at all," returned Marjorie again.

"But perhaps the most harassing thought of all, to poor Lady Athelston," continued Jelfrey, making his desperate last throw, "is that Sir Neil encourages this—nay, more, tempts her on. In fact, he—he seems to enjoy being caught in the meshes of an attachment which has an extraordinary and incomprehensible attraction for him, such as"—the die should be cast now; he would not draw back from his last throw—"no other attachment ever could have had. Is this a state of affairs which Lady Athelston can possibly sit down and calmly contemplate?"

"I don't know," said Marjorie, looking full into his face with her bright, honest eyes; "but Lady Athelston has a marvelous power of sitting down and calmly contemplating affairs."

"Not such as those," rejoined Jelfrey, his face hot and scarlet now; "not the perfidy of the girl whom she has taken into her house in charity, or the faithlessness of her own son; above all, not the treachery practiced toward—another."

"I see," said Marjorie, in her clear, slow voice. "I see what you are endeavoring to make me see; and more, perhaps. It is very gratifying to me, Mr. Jelfrey, to be made aware of what you think," she went on, calmly, as she began the descent of the hill. "It will at least enlighten me as to your motives, if I am puzzled by your conduct in the future, as I have been a little puzzled by it now and then in the past. Of course you are kind to have confided in me; and you have been kind in your frequent warnings to Lady Athelston to beware of the girl whom she did *not* take into her house in charity—there has been no question of charity in the matter. And of course you are kind to Sir Neil in putting him on his guard against that solitary man who is working among the hills here for a scanty livelihood. Oh, pray guard Sir Neil against him, because you choose to hate him, and most of all, perhaps, because I choose to like him. We are surrounded by traitors," added the girl, changing her tone to one of easy sarcasm, "and if we steer safely among them we shall owe it all to you. Accept my thanks, at least, Mr. Jelfrey; for if there *is* one thing in the world more despicable to me than all other bad things put together, it is—treachery."

Jelfrey's cheeks burned hotly. The tone was so very unmistakable (though the sarcasm was uttered with lady-like quietness), that he failed entirely in his answer. Yet when Emily Jorden met them—though she made room immediately for him at her side, and smiled her pleased welcome—he quitted Marjorie with real unwillingness; angry with himself though, as he always was, for being so enthralled by the only girl who had ever carelessly and openly despised his devotion.

There was no contempt of his devotion in

Emily Jorden's manner as they walked together down the valley, and the devotion was apparently quite genuine. But at the valley gate, where the horses were being put to the carriages again, and the scattered party gathering, Eustace left her and joined Sir Neil, who had dawdled a little apart, with a rather ominous gloom on his fair, handsome face.

"How dismal Miss Chester looks!" began Jelfrey, with his usual tact, and in a low, interested, yet idle tone. "She looks as if she had been vexing some one she is fond of. That would be Miss Marjorie Castillain, I fear, for I can not be sure of Miss Chester loving any one else who is here to-day. Miss Castillain is so very hasty, that I can readily fancy her hurting the feelings of a timid, shy girl like Miss Chester."

"Miss Castillain has had nothing to do with it," returned Sir Neil, promptly, a light of sudden hope, of which he was unconscious, flashing in his long blue eyes; "it was I who bothered her. And why the deuce don't you speak out, man?—why are you smiling?"

"At your word 'bothered,' I can pretty well see what has vexed Miss Chester; not your bothering, but the feeling of having parted from you in a pet—of course you did part in a pet, Sir Neil?" he added, with his questioning smile.

And Sir Neil, hot and angry, and glad to find a vent for his impatience, told of Lina's cold manner to himself, and then of a certain quiet rebuke which had rankled within him most of all.

At this Jelfrey laughed, so lightly and so skeptically, that Sir Neil Athelston felt his spirits rise again; and he listened to the tutor's specious arguments with an eager gladness shining again under the heavy lashes of his sleepy eyes.

But there was one thing Jelfrey had yet to say, and it must be said now. He could not beat about the bush, as he had tried to do with Marjorie. He must just say what he had to say, and leave the words to take root as they would. So, acting upon this determination, Jelfrey drew the bow suddenly and sharply, and the arrow, poisoned and double-pointed, sped surely on its way, keen and direct.

"You are sure of these things?" questioned Sir Neil, in Jelfrey's first pause; and his lips were tight and merciless. "You swear to them?"

"I should swear to them," rejoined the tutor, calmly, "if I were such a one as the fellow of whom I have been speaking. But, being allowed to be your friend, Sir Neil, and Miss Castillain's friend, I merely need to tell you of the fact."

"The scamp!" muttered the baronet. "And you overheard Miss Chester tell him she would go to his cottage the first evening she had liberty?"

"I overheard it; yes."

"And you say Marjorie goes?"

"I know it."

"Great heavens! a vagabond, wandering painter fellow! And you say there is some—confound it all! what were your words?—connection between—between—"

"Leave the thought now, Sir Neil," put in Jelfrey, with gentle composure, "and leave all the planning to me. I will forge the weapons ready to your hands, if you will only take care to use them skillfully when I give them up. I am sorry in my heart that Miss Castillain should act unworthily; but I certainly do not think Miss Chester has done so. I think this man has some power, perhaps, over her, from which your brave and generous hands may rescue her, to win her whole heart's gratitude and love. Your watchword is but to watch and wait; mine is to dare and do."

"I shall drive my mother now," said Sir Neil, with a great lightening of his cloudy face; "I was too much enraged to do so before. By Jove! Jelfrey, though you half maddened me, you seem to have given me a capital notion; and, upon my honor, I'm obliged to you, though I can't exactly tell what the notion is. Marjorie," he went on, his voice a little stiff and proud to her as he came up to the phaeton where his mother sat, "how are you going?"

"If you drive your mother, I shall sit behind you with Miss Chester," returned Marjorie. promptly, perhaps noting his displeasure, for a slow flush rose in her face as Colonel Stuart assisted her to her seat. "Of course I had an original design of driving in our own carriage," she added, as she arranged the soft white rug about her, "but, like most of my designs, it was frustrated. Louisa proclaimed her determination to drive herself, on condition Mr. Jelfrey would assist her—the poor old pony *may* be restive—and so I found myself in the wrong box. You needn't look scared at that, Colonel Stuart; it isn't slang. You ought to know it's a quotation from 'Foxe's Martyrs,' quite a Sunday book."

The colonel was looking across at Lina.

"Then I am to drive my wagonette empty!" he said, only for the sake of saying something; "or shall I go back and persuade Mr. Spendir to take a seat with me?"

"He said he should not go home until dusk," returned Lina, wondering why Sir Neil looked round so suddenly at both the girls, but never coloring under his gaze.

"Do, Colonel Stuart," cried Marjorie, and she *did* color brilliantly as she spoke the genial, ready words, "do fetch him, and bring him to High Athelston, and *do* make Lady Athelston ask him to dinner."

"I think, Marjorie," remarked Sir Neil, with a ridiculous assumption of authority, "that you forget of whom you speak. Don't you think so too, Stuart?"

"I forgot more than that," said the girl, lightly. "I forgot *to* whom I spoke. Now we are ready, Neil."

And Colonel Stuart moved away, puzzled by Marjorie's perpetual changes of voice and face and manner, and with his thoughts rushing over almost the same track as Neil's were taking, yet not in the same narrow groove.

CHAPTER X.

THE BIRTH OF A PLOT.

The long, late dinner was over at High Athelston, and the guests were scattered in groups about the brilliant drawing-rooms, many of them strolling through the wide glass doors curtained with pink and white satin, into the conservatories, fragrant and beautiful in the August moonlight,

and one or two young and fearless ones venturing out beyond upon the terraces.

Among the fantastic shadows thrown by the great stone figures on the balustrades, one of these young and fearless guests was walking alone now, looking to the right and left, with the moonlight falling on a bright and excited face, rich quivering lips, parted as if in the anxiousness of some unuttered thought, and beautiful, searching eyes.

"Lina, Lina," she called softly; and at last, though no voice answered, Marjorie saw the girl she sought, leaning against the great stone Ajax on the lowest terrace, her face raised in the moonlight, white as the pure white roses which drooped beside her.

"Lina," said Marjorie, very gently, laying both her warm little hands on Lina's cold, clasped fingers, "don't be angry with me for seeking you and breaking in upon your solitude. Lina, the pain you felt, I felt too; the stabs that hurt you, hurt me too: that's my excuse."

"I had no right to feel them at all," said Lina, in a low voice of pain, unutterably deep; and Marjorie flinched a little to meet the steadfast, sorrowful gaze of the dark, unhappy eyes. "I thought I had learned to bear it all—to bear all slights and all unkindness; but—but I was tired to-night, and miserable, and could not—could not help minding it. Oh! I wish—"

But the intense, passionate whisper broke off there, and Lina's clasped hands—raised passionately for one moment—fell still and motionless again.

"You wish Lady Athelston would let you mingle with her friends only when you choose, you mean?" inquired Marjorie, softly. "She never will, Lina. You are very useful to her; you are always ready to make every thing clear and distinct to her; you are a very pretty object about her rooms; you are something tangible for her to lean upon; and, above all, your presence beside her insures her her son's attention."

"Oh, hush!" cried Lina, her low white brow drawn with a great pain.

"And all these things being in favor of Lady Athelston's keeping you with her," continued Marjorie, still very softly, as she wistfully and sadly watched the pale face below her, "Lady Athelston will never release you until some miracle has extracted the vast leaven of selfishness which her nature contains. But, Lina"—the girl's voice saddened with a great earnestness—"the covert insults which you have undergone to-night have been worse to me than to you. Oh! think, Lina, if they would not have pierced you even more bitterly and more keenly if you had felt that the one who caused them all was your own only sister. You will leave this house some day; you can do so when you like; but I—but I, Lina, can never be any thing but Louisa's sister. I can never, never lose the shame of feeling every thing she does; not as if it were done to myself, but worse—oh! far, far worse—as if it were done *by* myself. You can never have that misery."

"Why does she do it?" asked Lina, in a wondering whisper. "I have never meant to hurt or injure her. I can understand the haughty contempt of those strange ladies; I can understand Mr. Jelfrey's supercilious satire; I can understand Lady Athelston's timid avoidance of me when she sees this; and I—I think I can understand Sir Neil's condescending patronage; but—"

"But you never," smiled Marjorie, with tears in her eyes—"you mean you never shall be able to understand why my sister should have made a point of turning every one against you, misrepresenting you so grossly, and making you so uncomfortable. Well, I'll tell you why it is. It's easily told—it's because she's a beast! Never mind whether it is envy, hatred, or malice. It is originated by a beast, and it is, therefore, unworthy of speculation. How you shudder! Come in; it is drear and chilly here."

For an instant Lina shrunk back; then, with an implicit trust in Marjorie which had been growing upon her ever since she had first seen the bright, brave, merry face, she took the hand offered her.

"You are so good and patient and gentle—so wise and trustful, too!" Marjorie said, stooping impetuously and kissing the delicate lips, "that it seems a mockery for *me* to advise you. But, Lina—and you know we can not be any thing but truthful out here in the great wide calm and beauty of the night—I love you so well that my greatest wish is to help you and make you happier. You will remember this. Promise me to remember this."

But Lina little guessed, as the two girls passed slowly up the broad moonlit steps, hand in hand, for how long she should remember this.

"Miss Chester, Lady Athelston is asking for you. Will you allow me the pleasure of taking her what she seems to miss so sorely?"

Colonel Stuart had met them on the terrace, and, taking no heed of Marjorie, offered his arm to Lina with his pleasantest smile. Marjorie, not behind him in kindly thought for the lonely girl, walked into the drawing-rooms beside them; listening as Colonel Stuart talked to Lina, but waiting while she answered. And Sir Neil seeing them, joined them with a pleasant eagerness.

"As she was obliged to come in again, Miss Marjorie," said Colonel Stuart, when they moved away, after lingering a little with Lina and Lady Athelston, "I thought I might come to you."

"You are always kind," replied Marjorie, quietly.

"Poor child! It would have been kinder to have left her with you there."

"It is odd how one girl can find pleasure in hurting the feelings of another, isn't it?" asked Marjorie, the question really grave and anxious.

"It is odd how any one can find pleasure in hurting the feelings of any one," he answered, smiling.

And the bright color rose in Marjorie's cheeks, and her eyes flashed, because she gave his words a meaning which he had never intended.

In one of the distant recesses of the inner drawing-room, Louisa Castillain sat bending over a book; while Eustace Jelfrey, on a seat beside her, and leaning toward her as if he, too, were intent on the same book, spoke in a lowered tone. For a long time they had been sitting so, while those guests who passed within sight thought how deeply interested they must both be in the plates before them. There was a movement among the brilliant little crowd in the other drawing-rooms, and Louisa rose slowly, and let her companion take the book.

"Then you will manage that," he whispered, his eyes carelessly following his hands as he very deliberately and unnecessarily moved other things on the table to make room for the book he put down. "While we stay here, you will make and take your own opportunity for persuading Lady Athelston to write to whatever address Miss Chester gave her; and I think she will find that all is not as it should be."

"Poor Lady Athelston!" sighed Louisa, with an unconscious smile of cruel jealousy; "she shall not be imposed upon, if I can prevent it."

"You can at least prevent its being continued," insinuated Jelfrey, blandly; "and you are, I know, anxious to do so, as you are anxious to do all kind things. My help will only be of slight service to you, Miss Castillain, but surely you know how happy it always makes me to assist in any thing you undertake."

"Then you leave it with me to get this letter written?" she asked, showing plainly the pride and pleasure that his words had given her; "and, of course, without Sir Neil's knowledge?"

"Of course, without Sir Neil's knowledge—yet," he answered, making an effort to speak as if it were of little importance, "and when the letter is ready, Miss Castillain, you will tell me. It will, at any rate, insure me another private interview with you," he added, meaningly; "and so you will give me the promise, to cheer me up until then."

Louisa gave it to him, smiling coyly; grateful herself for any excuse for another interview such as this had been, where they had one close interest in common, and where such whispered words were now and then exchanged. No regret for the treachery that had been whispered hovered in the thoughts of either as they separated that night; only a mean and cruel satisfaction that their plans were mutual, as far as they could safely see to form them.

With ready smiles and gentle kisses, Louisa Castillain hovered about Lady Athelston in her room that night, whispering sympathetic words, which yet had power to stir up a strange, uncomfortable doubt and mistrust in Lady Athelston's bewildered mind, and took Louisa on with steady steps toward the realization of her wish.

"I will leave it now until another time," she thought to herself, smiling still.

Then she kissed "dear Lady Athelston" again, and went with a gay step to the room which Marjorie shared with her, now that the house was so full.

"Asleep already!" she muttered, glancing sharply into her sister's face half buried in the clothes. "She laughs and chatters all day long, then falls asleep like a baby. And I particularly wanted to speak to her before I rang. Marjorie!"

"Don't apostrophize over my prostrate form like a feminine Mark Antony," said Marjorie, opening for a moment the big brown eyes that looked suspiciously sleepless. "You can preach to-morrow. Good-night!"

And Marjorie drew the clothes still higher over her ears, yet tried ineffectually to shut out her sister's running fire of reproof, then of advice, then—worst of all to Marjorie—of sarcastic comment on the solitary girl who, far away in another wing of the house, sat at her window, "thinking, thinking, thinking," while the moon rode slowly over the grand old gloomy hills.

CHAPTER XI.

LAYING THE TRAIN.

"But the other ladies have promised. Do come, Miss Chester. Why shouldn't you? The drag will be round at twelve, and we shall meet you in the birch coppice for lunch. Don't be the only one to disappoint us, Miss Chester."

Sir Neil Athelston, in his velveteen shooting-coat, his felt hat in his hand, and his face growing angry in its eagerness, lingered in his mother's room, while the gentlemen gathered in the hall below, and wondered why he did not come.

"You will come, Miss Chester?" he persisted, heeding not an atom whether his mother heard his entreaty or not. "Promise me."

"Don't ask me any more, please, Sir Neil," answered Lina, turning to him, and speaking very firmly and decidedly. "Nothing you could say would persuade me."

"Why not? Why, in the name of Heaven, have I no power to move you? Do you hear others set my com—my wishes at defiance as you do?"

"No," she answered, gently; "therefore you may well afford, Sir Neil, to dispense with my obedience."

"I won't," cried Neil, carried beyond himself by wrath, as he watched the proud, still firmness of the girl's delicate lips; "I won't dispense with the only obedience I care one straw about. Every soul in the house may do what they please, if you will listen to my wishes. Say you will come."

"Neil," put in his mother from the window where she sat, speaking rather querulously because her son seemed to be angry with her companion, "the keepers are here, and have been waiting for a long time. You always *do* keep every body waiting. Go, my dear. The ladies and the lunch will be at the coppice before you have bagged a solitary bird. I shall not be able to go with them to-day, but Mrs. Esdaile will take my place."

"May Miss Chester come?" asked Sir Neil; so easily now that neither of his listeners guessed with what anxiety he spoke.

"No, I shall want her. What does she care about such things?"

"Mother," said Neil into the trumpet, his voice shaking a little with suppressed amusement, "Louisa Castillain is awfully anxious to stay at home with you, only she doesn't like to offer, she says. She wants you to ask her. She loves you tremendously; in fact, she's never quite happy unless she is with you—never."

"Does Louisa really wish to stay with me?" asked Lady Athelston. "How do you know?"

"Marjorie told me—in confidence, though," replied Neil, a falsehood more or less being of little consequence to him; "but you are to ask her yourself, and not to pretend that we've spoken of it. You understand?"

"Yes, I understand," was the pleased reply. "Louisa is very fond of me."

"*Passionnément*," put in Neil, solemnly. "But you see now, mother, you must send away Miss Chester, because she and Louisa never agree."

"Yes," assented Lady Athelston, with an instinct of the necessity of this, "Miss Chester can go."

"There!" cried Neil, raising his head from the

trumpet, with an air of great relief, "you are conquered, Miss Chester; but, to make assurance doubly sure, I shall leave it in Marjorie's hands."

"No, please," argued Lina, earnestly; "because, if she asks me, I must go."

"I know you must," laughed Neil, delighted. "How I shall look out for the carriage now, and not for the sake of the lunch—not quite! Good-bye for a few hours. Good-bye, my little friend."

Then Neil, his handsome face unclouded again, ran down-stairs, and left his commands in Marjorie Castillain's hand, drawing her a little apart from the other guests in the hall.

"Poor little thing, it will be a change for her," he concluded, flushing duskily under Marjorie's calm gaze. "The mother keeps her so preciously close in a general way. And she is so fond of you, Marjorie, that she will be sure to enjoy this with you. No wonder she is fond of you, dear," he added, with a slight qualm, "you are so good to her, and so like one of us. I mean to say—"

"You don't quite know what you mean to say, Neil," returned Marjorie, carefully picking an end of his mother's wool from his brown sleeve; "but providentially I always understand as well what you leave unsaid as what you say; so—it's all right."

One or two of the gentlemen were envying him a little as he lingered with his betrothed; for had they not seen her gentle touch upon his arm? But Neil turned away, feeling rather uncomfortable, wishing he had not seemed so much in earnest over this.

"Louisa," he said, in a voice whose ease and coldness sounded refreshing even to himself after its late warmth and anxiety, "my mother is awfully anxious to have you at home with her this afternoon; too bad of her, isn't it? But she seems to have set her heart upon it. I don't think she's ever happy without you, Louisa. But I must tell you this, she is so fearful of your staying against your will, that she won't be happy unless you can be generous enough to consent very readily. I am vexed, because I hoped to see you in the coppice; but mother will be lost without you. You are so very amusing with her, and possess such a fund of narrative."

Neil left off there, afraid of laughing. But Louisa Castillain guessed nothing of this. Her whole face brightened as she glanced across at Jelfrey.

"I will stay gladly, Neil," she said; "I always like to give dear Lady Athelston a little pleasure."

And Neil thanked her so heartily that Colonel Stuart—standing near and examining his gun—guessed rather more of his reason than Sir Neil would have cared to acknowledge.

"Start early, Mrs. Esdaile; we trust to you," the young baronet said gayly, as, with the dogs around him, he looked back from the hall-door; raising his hat from a face which never could have been so careless or so happy if he had known for what a cruel work his own selfish plans had smoothed the way.

When the shooting party returned that evening, merry and muddy and tired, the ladies—who had driven home an hour earlier—were in their own rooms, resting before they began to dress for dinner; all except one, who *happened* to be passing slowly along the east corridor as Mr. Jelfrey entered it on the way to his own room at the farther end.

"We have arranged it all," she said, in a hurried tone of congratulation. "I've written the letter myself. Lady Athelston asked me to do it for her, and Sir Neil is not to know."

Eustace Jelfrey smiled down into Louisa Castillain's flushed, fair face, reading it steadily for a few moments. What he saw there—the light, shallow eyes were easily read—satisfied him that what she did, she did for him; no scruple of conscience hurting her, no generous qualm hindering her; and he trusted in her just so deeply and just so steadfastly as such natures trust in those which are a little higher than their own, in that they are powerless to sound the deeper and more sinful motive, and a little lower than their own, in that they obey in very weakness the guiding of the stronger will.

"How is the letter to be posted, Mr. Jelfrey?" asked Louisa, fidgeting coyly with the ribbons on her dress, and speaking with insinuating slowness, as she felt that he was still gazing into her bent face.

"Leave that to me," he answered, gayly. "I knew you would succeed; every thing is safe in your hands. Have you the letter with you? I will take it to the village office myself before I dress. I have more than half an hour to spare. Will you give it to me?"

"Yes," cried Louisa, ready in an instant to obey, yet evidently wishing to tell him more. "Lady Athelston did not know the number of the house in Berkeley Square, so she sent for Miss Chester; and I came away to—prevent the girl seeing me there. You said you thought it better that no one should recognize our part in this."

"I *agreed* that it was better, far better," replied Jelfrey, with an emphasis which would convey that he had only acceded to a proposal of hers.

"Although our part is taken in simple kindness to dear Lady Athelston," resumed Louisa.

"Yes," returned the tutor, promptly. "How did Miss Chester take it?"

"I met her coming out of Lady Athelston's room a few minutes ago—in fact, only as I came along here to meet Marjorie," she answered, never guessing how he detected her untruth the moment it was uttered. "She always looks white enough, doesn't she? but I never saw any face so deathly white as hers was then. I spoke to her, trying to judge how great her craven fear might be, and she really could not answer me for a time. Then, do you know, she spoke quite calmly. There is such a strange power in guilt," added the girl, innocently, "to cloak itself under a calm and indifferent manner. But I could see her real terror, and knew what was meant when she complained of a horrible headache, and said she was going to her room. Of course I sympathized, and asked her to try to come down, but she answered me in real panic. She must lie down, she said; she sometimes did have these severe headaches, and rest was the only thing to take them away. But I don't believe, Mr. Jelfrey, that she ever had a headache like this before—do you?"

Jelfrey laughed, and then they separated; the letter in his pocket, and his whispered words of flattery ringing in her ears.

The smile that lingered on her lips when she entered her own room angered Marjorie a good deal; because it was, as the younger sister said to herself, the hypocritical smile which boded harm for some one. Marjorie, in her morning-dress, was idly sitting before a table in the bow-window, her chin resting on her hands, and her eyes on the glowing sky above the hills.

"You are a nice, sociable companion!" said her sister, having waited in vain for her to speak. "Can't you tell me something about the afternoon, instead of sitting mooning there?"

"Yes, I could tell you lots of things," rejoined Marjorie, absently. "Of whom shall I tell you first?"

"You lunched all together, of course, in the coppice?"

"Yes, and ate an enormous luncheon, every one of us. I never saw Eustace Jelfrey so greedy or so gay."

Louisa darted a swift look into her sister's face, and her lips tightened viciously. But something in the absent, far-away brown eyes (in which the old drollery lurked) stopped the words that were coming.

"She does it only to provoke me," Miss Castillain thought to herself, "and she shall not see that she has the power. "And Emily Jorden was in her seventh heaven, I suppose?" she said, aloud.

"Seventeenth, I fancy. I could hardly recognize her on the heights to which the handsome tutor's devotion led her."

"And Sir Neil?" inquired Louisa, with spiteful emphasis, "of course his devotion was for you alone?"

"Sir Neil is too polite a host to bestow all his devotion on one lady, however worthy," replied the girl, demurely.

"Then Miss Chester had a trifling share, eh?" resumed Louisa, yawning as she looked round on the preparation for her elaborate toilet.

"You are always correct in your remarks," Marjorie said. "Why an unnecessary interrogation at the end?"

"And Colonel Stuart," asked Louisa, with a keen, cold look into her sister's face, "I suppose he paid marked attention to Lady Athelston's companion, as usual? If it were not that he is getting old, and is such a thoroughly confirmed widower (which is as bad as an old bachelor), he would get laughed at for his ridiculous attention to that girl."

"What a good thing it must be to be getting old!" mused Marjorie, her eyes still on the distant crimson of the sunset sky, her chin still resting on her warm, white hands.

"His absurd conduct to the girl is, after all, though, no more absurd than your behavior toward that pettifogging artist in Nether Lane," continued Louisa, with slow scorn. "Every body is remarking upon it. I should not like my conduct to be spoken of as yours is now. And you make no secret of your infatuation."

"An artist," said Marjorie, with quiet gravity, "may rank even with a miser's daughter."

"Even owning that artists, as a rule, rank with the aristocracy," replied Louisa—"and you won't get the aristocracy to own it—such an artist as this would not be included. Bah! he is not worth calling an artist! He's a mere vagabond, and it was an insult to us for him to have been introduced among us."

"He never wished to be introduced among us, I'm sure," rejoined Marjorie, uttering no depreciation of his talents, as she had done to Lina. "We are not such gods and goddesses here in Highshire. But, as I like him very much," she added, her eyes taking their old laughter, as she rose and rang the bell, "and intend to woo him from his vagabond ways—'homeless, ragged, and tanned,' you know—I hope you'll make much of him, for your poor sister's sake."

"Good gracious, Marjorie!" cried Louisa, vulgar in her excitement as the mean-hearted often are, "don't let other people hear you say the mad things you say to me. Will you never know what belongs to your position?"

"The finest brace of birds which Colonel Stuart brought down," continued Marjorie, her voice full of laughter now as well as her eyes, "he himself took to the cottage in Nether Lane, to leave for Mr. Spendir; and I went with him, and Miss Chester went with me, and Sir Neil went with her, and Lady Helen went with him. Oh, Lady Helen was stiff to-day! She was a living amalgamation of jealousy and spleen and starch, and—and poor little Miss Chester's happiness was any thing but unmixed."

"And you really all made such donkeys of yourselves as to go to that place and carry game for that man?"

"No; not all," was the calm answer. "Mr. Jelfrey never could so far forget himself, and Emily Jorden never could so far forget *him*; and of course the others did not. I wonder what I'd better wear to-night. I feel so terribly lowered by my visit to *that place* and my interest in *that man*."

"Your mockery does not hurt me," returned Louisa, pulling again snappishly at the bell; "you always reserve all your amiable conversation for me."

"You never talk of any thing I care about," the younger sister answered, with a sound almost like a sob in her voice. "You don't care for what I care for. You don't scorn the things I scorn. I—I suppose it never will be."

"I wish strangers knew how very unfascinating you are at times," remarked Louisa, stolidly, "however different you may appear before them."

"They will surely know it presently," rejoined Marjorie, very calm and cold again, "for constant information on the subject will fix it on their minds at last, and you will be rewarded—as all virtue is."

The maid had entered the room by this time, and the sisters hardly spoke again, except to her, until they went down-stairs together, the lamplight falling richly on them, glancing among the satin folds of Louisa's long white dress, and softening the harshness as well as subduing the haughtiness of her cold, regular features; chasing away the weary look that had lingered so long on Marjorie's piquant face, while it cast dainty sunset-tinted rays on the thin pink dress which cost just one-sixth of what her sister had paid for hers, but to which the graceful *élancé* figure gave an elegance that was priceless. Then the elder sister said, with careless nonchalance,

"We shall have no *contretemps* to-night, at any rate, for Miss Chester is not coming down. Why she ever should have come down among us, I can not imagine. She is keeping her room for some mysterious reason or other."

And Marjorie answered not a word, but her steps slackened and she fell behind. From the bottom of the wide, lighted staircase, Louisa looked up with a sneer on her lips, but the girl was following, though slowly; following with her gloved hand on the balusters, humming softly as she came. Seeing her so, and having no legitimate cause of complaint, Miss Castillain went on, and entered the drawing-room alone.

Then suddenly the gay *insouciance* left Marjorie's face, the notes died on her lips. With swift, light steps she ascended the stairs again, and at Lina's door bent her mouth to the keyhole, entreating to be let in. The voice, true and bright and earnest, carried a message of hope as well as pity to the desolate girl within, who sat alone, shivering with fear in the shadow of a coming trouble.

CHAPTER XII.

STOLEN.

Beyond the hills the crimson light had faded. There was certainly a full and efficient substitute in the long dining-room at High Athelston, where gay voices mingled with soft high-bred laughter, and the glow of fire and lamp-light gleamed on shining plate and crystal, or darted coyly here and there among the jewels; but, without the great lighted mansion, the park lay dark and chill; darkest of all in the great avenue, down which a girl's figure—small and darkly dressed—was passing swiftly.

Never once did Lina Chester pause until she reached the high entrance gates, over which the lamps were burning on either side the stone leopards.

"Will you unlock the little side-gate for me, please?" she asked the lodge-keeper, timidly, yet with the gentle dignity which, in all her humility, was inseparable from her. "The post-bag was gone before I was aware, and I want to go to the post-office in the village."

"Law, Miss Chester," cried the woman, astonished, "to think of your being here, out by yourself, and the house so full! Haven't you a key of the bag?—because it's here waiting. The mail-cart doesn't pass till nine."

"No, I have no key," said Lina, her lips cold and stiff. "I must go on to the village—I don't mind, it is such a short distance. It is not as if I had to go to Churchill."

"Of course you couldn't go *there*, miss," ejaculated the woman, decisively. "Come in, please, and rest a bit; and my little girl shall take the letter."

"Oh no, thank you," returned Lina, in quick fear; "I would rather go myself."

The woman smiled incredulously, and made a guess which, to be sure, was a very natural one: "My lady's companion had an acquaintance, to whom she wrote on the sly."

"If you'll wait here half an hour, miss," she said, aloud, "you can give the letter yourself to the driver of the mail-cart, and he'll post it for you; you've only to give him a trifle. It's sure to go safe, and you can give it to him yourself, to make sure."

"I can not wait, thank you," said Lina, her voice shaking more and more. "I shall be back at High Athelston, I hope, in less than half an hour. Will you let me out now, please?"

With a sigh at the willfulness of the girl, looking so beautiful and so fragile in the uncertain light, the lodge-keeper opened the gate; and, after one more earnest entreaty to be allowed to send her little girl with Miss Chester, she let her out into the deepening shadows of the wide, open road.

"I couldn't help it," she muttered to herself, locking the gate again; "I hope I sha'n't be blamed. If all's true that we hear, Sir Neil wouldn't care to know this; and if it is a sweetheart she writes to—as what else could it be to take her out in this way?—the sight of the letter would bring him into one of his worst tempers."

Along the silent highway went Lina swiftly, too intent on one thought and one desire to notice whether or not she met any other human being between High Athelston and the village post-office.

A little cottage it was, next to the village alehouse, where a group who stood at the door stopped for a minute in their noisy talk to watch the little dark figure hurry up the cottage garden. One quick hope nerved Lina's courage as she rapped at the door, but it was dispelled at once when she entered the kitchen; for, though only a low fire burned on the hearth, and a small candle upon the table under the window, the old couple who kept the office knew her in a moment.

She had not thought how hard it would be for her to pass unrecognized by the people round High Athelston, among whom her exquisite beauty and her incomprehensible avoidance of the young baronet were prolific themes of wonder and discussion; and among whom her gentle, courteous sympathy was given in just the way they liked best.

"Am I in time with a letter?" she asked, feeling in her pocket slowly, and looking around her with a strange eagerness literally burning in her dark eyes.

"If the bag 'ad been sealed, Miss Chester," said the woman, as she brought forward a chair, "it should 'a be'n in time for you. I'd undo it myself if the master 'adn't adone it."

"Thank you," replied Lina—"thank you very much; but I'm glad not to have given you that trouble. You are already sorting, I see," she added, glancing with painful intentness at the letters which the old man had been dividing by the light of the candle on a table under the window.

"Yes, miss; and I'll sit down again if you'll excuse me," he answered, pushing his spectacles down to their place on his broad nose. "I've only five minutes more."

"Go on—please go on," entreated Lina, quickly, "while I sit and rest for a few minutes, as—as I don't feel very well. Here's my letter."

It was a commonplace-looking letter enough, addressed to Miss M'Mullen, No. 7 Conduit Street, London; but yet the hand which laid it on the table trembled so that the fingers could not be trusted to place it on any certain heap; and the voice which said, "Which are the London letters?" was but a weak and unsteady whisper.

"Here, miss. Thank you. Them's the London letters, but I 'spects I've more here."

And Lina, watching breathlessly and with a throb of pain as each letter was read by the poor

light, could yet join in the running conversation which the old woman required all the time.

"Miss Chester! Good mercy me, Miss Chester! what's the matter?"

"I'm faint," gasped Lina, pushing with both hands the thick, dark hair from her temples, and raising a pair of wide, wild eyes to the woman's face—"I'm faint. Can you—can you—get me a little brandy? Quick, please."

"Go, go!" cried the woman, shaking by the shoulder the poor old man, who sat by the table, alarmed and bewildered. "Go into the public and get it. We can settle for it after, only be quick. Oh, Miss Chester! what shall we do? You must be so awful ill."

"Is he gone?" asked Lina, still gazing at the woman, as if her sight were deserting her. "Is he gone? Will he be long?"

"Not long—not long, my dear," the old woman said, soothingly, longing to put her pitiful arms round the slight, drooping form.

"Will he be quick?"

"Yes, he'll be quick, my dear. He's sure to be quick," she said, coming a little nearer, in her great pity, and slipping one arm round the girl's shoulder to support her.

"You are very good," whispered Lina, still with the miserable bewilderment in her eyes, "very good; but would you be kinder still? Would you go and hasten him? They will keep him. Oh, do go and hasten him!"

"I don't like to leave you," said the woman, softly, while her eyes filled.

"Please go!" cried the girl, in intense eagerness, clasping her hand unconsciously.

And the old post-mistress, unable to meet the entreating gaze of Lina's eyes—so unnaturally big and dark to-night in the white face—turned away at once.

"I'll go, my dear," she said comfortingly; "I won't be a minute."

Slowly Lina Chester rose when she was left alone, trembling in every limb, and supporting herself by the table. One hand, shaking helplessly, moved the top letter from one of the heaps, and took away one that lay next below it, replacing them all evenly without this. More and more the slight white fingers trembled as she put this letter into her pocket; and the face, white and scared and guilty, which met her in the common glass that hung beside the window, made her start back as if a blow had struck her.

"I am ill," she murmured to herself, speaking in that tone of self-pity and self-vindication which only the utterly desolate ever use; "I wish—oh, how I wish that was all!"

They came in then with the brandy in a tumbler, and Lina—instinctively recoiling from it—had yet to sip it while they stood and watched; watched her as if they feared that when she put the glass down she would fall.

In quiet, broken tones she thanked them; but when she turned to leave, the good old woman followed her out into the dark little garden, and took her hand to link within her sturdy arm.

"I'll not leave you, miss, I couldn't; so please don't say it."

So they walked from the village together in the darkness, and in a few minutes the mail-cart rattled along the road behind them, and the bag was put in.

In the light of the lamps at the park-gates Lina stood to thank and dismiss the old post-mistress. Then, her step still weak and slow, she passed again along the silent avenue. But, instead of entering the house, she hurried on across the wide, still park, and came out into the dense darkness, among the elms in Nethel Lane.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE ARTIST'S COTTAGE.

Fitz Spendir, stooping over his work at the cottage window that evening, stopped his low, clear whistling for a minute, and raised his head, intent and listening. Presently he bent it once more over the block which he was preparing for the engraver, and whistled again, this time only four clear notes, which made a call.

"All right, dad—what is it?"

The call had been answered promptly enough, for the child he summoned came instantly into the open door-way between the two rooms, and stood there wiping his hands on a small brown towel.

"Look on the chimney-piece, Jet," said the artist, going on with his work. "There's a sixpence and three pennies. Take the pennies to that fellow at the gate. He does not look very saint-like; but a penny or two can't make him worse, any more than the torrent of abuse he's had next door can make him better."

"She's blowing up now, dad," said the boy, opening the door, and hesitating. "I wish she'd go in."

"Frightened—eh?" laughed the artist, "and not ashamed to show it! Bah! Run off."

But Jet did not run off at all; on the contrary, he walked very slowly, and took care to leave the door open behind him. So Fitz, though he took up the broken strain of "The Standard-bearer" again, as he bent industriously over his block, still heard, above it, the shrill, raised tones of his next-door neighbor.

"Much use it is trying to keep away scamps from one's house when they're encouraged in one's very face. Some people don't mind, of course, because they've nothing to lose; but I have things to lose, and I'll appeal against money and bribery being given at my own door, and in my very face, to vagabonds who skulk about, and do no work, and for all I know are ticket-of-leave men. A nice sort to attract about one!"

Over the artist's face—turned full to the window now—a death-like pallor spread, blanching the lips that were half hidden in the rich brown beard, and drawing them with a great and passionate pain. The voices—his own boy's now joined with the woman's—went on outside, but no word reached his ears.

"Dad, dad!" cried Jet, entering presently, with his small white face wet with tears, and shutting the door behind him, carefully, this time; "she—she—she shook me!"

"Then you'd done something wrong," rejoined Fitz, his lips still white and stiff, while he tried, almost savagely, to regain his ease.

"No, I hadn't—no, I hadn't indeed, dad. I only said, 'If she was poor and came to beg, she'd rather have a penny than a scolding.'"

The artist's voice was shaken by a curbed and

fierce excitement. "Move off, I'll go and apologize for you."

"No, father; please don't," urged the child. "I quite meant it."

"And I'm not to say you're sorry?" he asked, surprised, bending his face—so full of strength and power, yet so full of gentleness—upon the earnest one beside him.

"No; because it wasn't a fib. You know it wasn't, dad."

"All right. I'll stay where I am, then," he said, raising his head with a sudden gesture, as if shrinking from something which had a strong fascination for him; "and you little know, laddie, what you have stopped. Apology!" he added, with a low laugh of intense satire. "There's little of the angel in me; mine would have been rather a savage apology — but never mind. It shall stand over once more. Only a woman; a woman alone with the pestilence of a black temper; solitary, too, as we are ourselves; and has had trouble too—if death ever does bring trouble, as they say it does. I don't know. I can only dream of one thing worth calling trouble."

"What, dad? Why are you mumbling? Stop drawing, and tell me about supper."

"Supper!" laughed the artist, raising his eyebrows at the anxious little face.

"Yes, supper," whined Jet; "I didn't care a bit about tea, because we'd no sugar, and it's so bitter without sugar and cream."

"Bitterer than most things, eh? Well, and what's the supper to be?"

"You said we should have sausages, dad," proposed the child, wistfully.

"Did I? Very well. Take that sixpence, and get half a pound. Don't stop in the town at all."

"Am I to bring you a bottle of beer, dad?"

"No, not to-night," was the quick reply. "We can't stand that every night, you know; only when we've had a *very* hard day's work."

"I wish we weren't poor," whined the boy. "Mrs. Cheere made such an ugly frown to-day when she said you ought to send me to school; and did so laugh when I told her you couldn't, because you couldn't afford it."

"You needn't tell her more than necessary, laddie," said the artist, again checking his passion by a strong, brave effort. "Whatever she says to you—if you can't walk away out of hearing—just quietly bear it, like a man. Poor lad!" he muttered, with a smile, "it is so easy to tell a child to bear things like a man, and so very hard for a man to bear them any way to make an example of. Look at the braid on your coat-sleeve," he continued, with a light change in his voice. "You can't go into the town until you've mended it."

"Won't you do it, father?"

"No; I'm too busy now; I want to make the most of the daylight. You can do it yourself famously."

"Jack Esdaile never mends his own coat, I know," grumbled Jet, "nor washes himself; and he always has buttons on. I believe the tailor puts them on. No other boys have to do every thing, like I have, dad."

"Don't they?" smiled Fitz, always wonderfully patient with the boy during his occasional fits of gloomy discontent and rebellion. "But still I don't quite see why you should envy them. You are happy, I know, my lad; and what more can any boys be—even little princes?"

"I expect I *could* be happier, dad," said the child, with a strange pathos in his young voice.

"Every body thinks that, dear. Perhaps little Jack Esdaile fancies that he might be happier."

"I don't think he does," was the boy's answer. "It's his birthday to-day, and he told me what lots of presents he had. Dad, when's my birthday?"

"I don't know; I—forget," the artist answered, as the dusky red rose slowly in his sunburned face.

"Do you, dad?" Jet asked, astonished. "Jack said you'd tell me, and Colonel Stuart said it too. He came in when we were talking of it, and he asked me all about what I could remember when I was little."

"Colonel Stuart is very good to you, laddie," said the artist, putting in the words rather hurriedly.

"Oh, so good, father!" was the enthusiastic reply. "He says I can go to The Anchorage whenever I like, and he always keeps me to Jack's tea, and he—he puts his hand on my head just as he does on Jack's. Oh, father, shouldn't we be happy if we had a beautiful house like Jack's?"

"Hope on, work on, laddie," said the artist, gently, "and some day your home will be as beautiful—*as* beautiful," he added, with a smile that was sarcastic in all its dreamy gentleness.

"Will it, father?"

"Yes."

"How soon?"

"God only knows, my boy. But do you think I could work as I work now, only for years and years untold of *this* life—of *this* home?"

"But, dad" (the boy's voice had caught some of the earnest patience of the man's, but was doubtful still, and rather regretful), "you don't mean Heaven, do you?"

Fitz drew the child into his arms, with a quick laugh which told nothing.

"Now, then, laddie, get a needle and mend your sleeve."

As the child sat at the opposite end of the room, his face bent low over his hands, sewing awkwardly at the binding of his jacket, the artist's eyes rested upon him with a strange, sorrowful tenderness in their gaze.

"If this could be bound all fresh, it would be a good deal better, father," put in Jet, without raising his engrossed eyes.

"I dare say."

Then the artist went on busily with his work, and did not look up again.

"I suppose I'm growing, dad," said Jet, when he rose at last, and put on his tight little coat.

"Well, and who asked you to grow, pray?" Fitz answered, merrily. So strangely, suddenly sad or merry he could be, as if the whole teaching of his life had been at variance with his nature.

"Do you know who's going to give me a penny for a bun when I go, father?" questioned Jet, anxiously, now that he was ready.

"No, who is it?"

"I don't know, father," rejoined the boy, thoughtfully. "I was wondering."

"So was I," laughed Fitz. "Let's set the

wonder at rest. The fair Dorcas will see you eating the bun though, and give it sharply as her opinion that it's no wonder I can't put you to school, when I spend all the money we get on 'bilious tantaddlings.' You remember she said it before."

"She's very cross; isn't she, father?" was the gentle remark, as the child put the money into his little basket with old-fashioned caution.

"Not so much cross as cantankerous; and that word's expressive according to its length. Now, old fellow, make haste."

"And, father," pleaded the boy, hesitating on the threshold, "after supper may be you'll play 'Old Maid.'"

The artist's laugh was fresh and spontaneous.

"All right, laddie, we'll enjoy half an hour at that suggestive and appropriate game. Then, after you go to bed, I must pluck one of Colonel Stuart's birds for our dinner to-morrow, unless I leave it for you in the morning. Now be off."

Even when he was left alone, the laugh lingered in the artist's eyes.

"What a relief it is when the ludicrous side of the cards is uppermost!" he said, moving away from his fine pencil-drawing, and beginning to paint rapidly at a great, highly colored board which he took from its covering. "There's almost always a ludicrous side to show in this life of ours—Jet's and mine. Poor Jet!—poor little lad! There's something almost touching, yet irresistibly comic too, in his fear, yet defiance, of our neighbor—the vixen! Just suppose she had little Jack Esdaile to deal with; or, indeed, any child who had not had his restless little spirit tamed and subdued as my lad's must be. It seems to me that—that all the happiness on earth is due to money," mused the artist, sitting before the gorgeous sign he was painting. "But I haven't quite settled that question with myself yet. Didn't Miss Castillain say something the very opposite, the other day? Ah! but what a difference it makes whether those who speak possess it or want it! One thousand pounds!"

The brush was moved rapidly, daringly; and the artist's eyes followed it, but withal they had the look which told of one close, concentrated thought, and one vague, distant ambition unresistingly pursued.

"One thousand pounds, and the interest for four years! Suppose—suppose," mused Fitz, as if to dismiss that other thought, "that I had no cause to save—that I had no purpose for which to save; and could spend all I earned. Suppose that I hadn't to take any little pettifogging job that turned up; and be grateful for it too, as I am for this, which will no sooner be put up, I dare say, than all the world will blurt out the painter's name to Colonel Stuart, from whom I'm keeping it hidden so carefully. It does go against the grain to paint this leopard; and yet it may be a good joke in years to come. 'The Athelston Arms.' Capital! And the arm that painted it can boast of no better deed through all its life! What's that about the leopard changing its spots? And all the Athelstons. But just suppose," the artist went on, again dismissing suddenly his old train of thought, "some one were to give me a hundred pounds, and tell me I must spend it on comfortable things—personal sort of things. Let me see what I should do. First I should buy—"

The long, calculating silence—during which Fitz in imagination spent his hundred pounds—was broken by the opening of the door, and he turned laughingly to the boy.

"I'm glad you are come, old fellow. I'd got to ninety pounds, and couldn't find any thing more I wanted. What a relief it is to come back to reality, and find I haven't got it to spend at all!"

Of course the child did not understand what this meant, and he was too full of some misery of his own to heed it.

"I didn't have my bun, dad," he said, through thick tears. "A big boy fought me, and took it."

"*And* the sausages?" asked Fitz, coolly.

"No, I didn't let him see those; but he hurt me, dad."

"And you hurt him, I suppose?" was the easy question, though Fitz Spendir's eyes were wrathful as he drew the persecuted boy to him.

"No, dad, not much, I—fear," said the child honestly, raising his wet eyes. "I was beaten. There; I knew you'd laugh, dad, and say I was a coward."

"Beaten boys are not all cowards, Jet," he answered, kindly. "Shall I tell you of one who was not?"

"Please, dad;" and the wet face brightened a little.

"Well, this boy once had a fight with a girl! Think of that; and a girl two years younger than himself; and he came off beaten abjectly, conquered ignominiously, and in abundant tears, too. Should you have said he was a coward?"

"Of course, dad, when he was beaten by a smaller girl."

"Of course, eh? Well, that proves how little you know about it, old fellow. That boy grew up into the bravest and cleverest soldier in the world, and did what lots of brave and clever men had tried to do and couldn't; and the conquering girl was never heard of afterward, that I know of. But I dare say she may have been living in some quiet corner, and may have read of the glorious victories this boy gained. They called him the Duke of Wellington in those days."

"Oh, dad! and is it true?"

"As true as that he was the conqueror at Waterloo. Now, make haste and get our supper, laddie."

While the boy cooked the sausages with comical deftness, and the artist went on indefatigably with his work, they told each other stories, asked each other riddles, amusing each other, as it had grown upon them to do in their solitary life, and their laughter was prompt and ready. Yet upon both faces there lingered a something which, if those who loved them had been near to-night, it would have given a cruel pain to see.

The sausages had been eaten and enjoyed; the game of "Old Maid" had been won—as it generally was—by Jet, with great complacency; and now the child was sleeping upstairs, and the artist sat beside the dying fire, and absently hummed the chorus of "Beautiful Isle of the Sea," as he plucked a partridge. Even over this, his fingers were rapid and dexterous; it seemed as if the man had no room in his life for either listlessness or indifference.

The rich, softened notes broke off suddenly, for at the cottage-door Fitz heard a quiet rap-

ping. He laid the bird down in the basket that held the feathers, and rose with a vexed surprise upon his face—a look of fear, too, that was half defiant. But all this vanished in a moment when he opened the door upon Lina Chester.

CHAPTER XIV.

GONE.

When Lina had entered the cottage, she turned in silence, and bolted the door behind her; then she raised her white, scared face, and Fitz, bending his bronzed and bearded one to meet it, kissed her very, very tenderly.

"My little pet, my poor little pet! What has frightened you to-night? Whose work is this?" he asked, his voice growing hot and passionate through all his tender greeting. Lina drew back a little and looked up at him, trying to bring a smile into her eyes instead of the hunted, frightened look which she knew that he could read there. And, standing so, she laid the letter on the table beside him, and told him how, and why, she had just stolen it from the office.

She did not modify the word. She did not try to hide one shade of her deceit or guilt. She told him the simple facts, in a hurried, whispered tone, which made the few fierce words that now and then interrupted her sound all the more clear and startling.

"If I had my hand upon that rascal's throat this moment, I should think it no sin to leave him dead there on the floor!"

She never tried to calm him, seeming to know how useless that would be; but when she uttered again the tutor's name she roused more hotly still the furious demon within him.

"Jelfrey!" The sarcastic tone was loud and fierce in the very intensity of its abhorrence. "Don't name *him* again. Though I should loathe my own hands if they touched him, I should think it no sin to murder *him*."

So the artist spoke in his savage anger, leaning his back heavily against the thin, slight wall of which he knew or guessed so little.

"Show me what you are painting now?" whispered Lina, her voice gentle and soothing, though still moved and shaken by pain. "Miss Marjorie Castillain told me of your last illustration, the view at the tarn. She often tells me of you."

"Does she?" asked the artist, the dusky red in his cheeks, and a softening light in his eyes. "God bless her!"

"She *is* good," said Lina, with deep earnestness. "And is—is that really the last illustration which will be wanted? And is your work here over now?"

"It ought to be," Fitz said, as they stood together over the block, "it would be if Colonel Stuart were like any one else, but he gives me another thing to do as I finish one; and—I think through him—I have had one or two small orders from houses in Churchill. And, now that I have nearly finished, he has commissioned me to copy a curious old family portrait for his sister, as the original belongs to him."

"He is good, too; very good," breathed Lina, softly.

"So good," replied the artist, as he cautiously put aside the block, "that it is no burden to a man to owe so much to him. And even that serpent is safe, being in his household. It is only by meeting such a man as he that I can keep a spark of manly truthfulness alive in me; and even then it's hard enough at times. God only knows how hard, when my thoughts have their fling, and travel backward through your life and mine, my little pet."

They were standing close together then, and for long minutes they spoke of that past, in hushed and saddened tones. Then Lina, suddenly recollecting herself, looked wistfully up through her tears into the strong, kind face above her.

"I must go ho—I must go back now," she said. And he answered only, putting a strong constraint upon himself,

"Come, I will take you."

"Only to your own gate," she said, quite firmly and decisively, though with the old loneliness and fear growing again in her eyes, now that she was leaving him. "You have left the letter," she added, hesitating just without the door.

"Never mind," he whispered (for they were close to Mrs. Cheere's lighted window), "I will burn it when I go in; the pleasure will reconcile me to my solitude. I shall take it up with the tongs, like a tainted thing as it is. Let it lie there, without a thought wasted on it."

"There is no fear of any one going in and seeing it, I suppose?" questioned Lina, still anxious.

"Mine is not a likely mansion to attract thieves of any kind," said the artist, laughing low. "Besides, if they are coming, they must pass us at the gate. No, not yet," he added, as Lina stopped at the wicket; "I must come just a few steps down the lane with you."

Only a few steps literally did she allow him to take; and then he sauntered back, his head bent in thought, his eyes so far away that they saw nothing in the shadow of the hedge, as he closed the gate and turned into the silent garden.

The cottage-door still stood open, and the little lamp was burning as he had left it. Almost before he was conscious what it was, Fitz Spendir missed something. He looked round, the brows coming down over his eyes. The letter! Yes; it had been left upon the table, here beside the lamp, and it was gone.

The artist's eyes, darkening with a terrible fear and rage, went over the small room from end to end. Then he turned suddenly, and left the house, his breath coming quick and hard. A sharp, short summons at Mrs. Cheere's door roused her from the placid enjoyment of a glass of mulled elder-wine, which she always "took medicinally" before going to bed.

"I have been away from home for five minutes," said the artist, breaking in upon her, almost grand in his curbed wrath and excitement. "Do you know who has been in my house during my absence?"

"If I keep my own house quiet and unmolested, I think it's about as much as need be expected of a woman," rejoined Dorcas, stiffly. "I never heard that I was expected to mind yours too."

"You haven't been in, then?" inquired Fitz, caring nothing for her rudeness.

"I?" retorted Dorcas, with a scornful sniff which died away in a laugh of contemptuous as-

tonishment; "I'd be sorry to go over your door-sill, I would!"

"Then you don't know?" asked Fitz, anxiously.

"If you are sober, I should think you know yourself," she answered, stirring her wine, with cool scorn; "unless you killed him, as you threatened. Didn't he go in to bring you Colonel Stuart's message, though I tried to persuade him against it, when he'd real need to be afraid of murder?"

"What do you mean?" inquired Fitz, aghast.

"Just what I say. And now I should think you can go, and not stare a person out of countenance like that, at unseemly hours."

A tact, not at all belonging to the artist, came to him now with ready help.

"But Mr. Jelfrey is only just gone, as you acknowledge," he said, quietly; "I fear he missed me, and couldn't leave the colonel's message. Will you kindly tell me what it was?"

"I hope I'm better bred than to ask gentlemen to tell me things that no way concern me," answered Dorcas, with stately pride. "And if you missed the message, and it was a good one for you, you just deserved it; having visitors that daren't come in the daylight."

Looking at him with vicious scrutiny, Dorcas saw the scarlet rush into the artist's face, and she smiled with grim satisfaction.

"Mr. Jelfrey is a *gentleman*," she said, with impressive and suggestive emphasis; "and when he reached your door, and found that you were engaged with a *person*" (the second emphasis added greatly to the impressiveness and suggestiveness of the first), "he came in here to remain until your house should be visitable. Then, when he supposed you were alone again, he went in to give you Colonel Stuart's message. I wish you good-night now, and hope these doings under my own roof—for the houses are but too unfortunately conjoined — may not be allowed by Colonel Stuart to be of long continuance."

With this slow shot, Dorcas turned again for consolation to her tumbler of warm beverage, but its flavor was a little diluted by the unflattering consciousness that "that vagabond artist" had not waited to hear the whole of her speech.

Not he! By the time Dorcas had stopped to take breath, he was out in the lane, pursuing his way under the elms, with the sure, swift vigilance of a greyhound. No figure moved before him in the almost utter darkness; no step sounded on the hard road; but he still held on his hurried, eager way, until he saw before him the end of the lines of overarching elms; and, in the partial light beyond, two figures beside the green door in the wall which bounded the park of High Athelston.

It did not need the artist's keen, well-practiced eyes to recognize them. Eustace Jelfrey had one hand on Lina Chester's arm, while the other placed the key in the lock of the door.

With a very madness of anger, Fitz Spendir sprung forward, but only to see the door close behind them as they entered the park together. The gray, ivy-covered wall was eight or nine feet high, but Fitz looked up at it, eagerly and hungrily, as if he could have cleared it at a bound.

Lina had crossed the park, entered the house, and crept to her own room — the hunted look darkening her sad eyes then, even as it had never done before—when the artist at last left the dark lane, and, re-entering the cottage, sat down beside the empty grate, and took up the half-plucked bird.

CHAPTER XV.

MARJORIE CASTILLAIN FORMS A RESOLUTION.

MARJORIE CASTILLAIN, in her pink evening dress, and with the roses unfaded in her rich brown hair, was sitting beside the fire in Miss Chester's bedroom when Lina entered it.

"I found Margaret here waiting to help you, Lina," she said, with only an instant's glance up from the fire, "so I told her you were downstairs, busy; and that, as I liked sitting here, she might go to bed. You *were* down-stairs, busy, so don't look shocked at me. It is no fib. You weren't upstairs, and you weren't idle. In that I was right, Miss Chester, as in most things —save the mark!"

Lina had smiled with sudden gladness when she saw Miss Castillain sitting in her room; but before she had taken off her hat, the short-lived brightness had vanished from her face, and it was pale with a pallor which frightened Marjorie. Yet Marjorie still spoke lightly, and still looked into the fire with idle enjoyment in her whole attitude; leaning forward on her low seat, and clasping both her hands round one knee.

"Margaret was glad enough to go back to the servants' hall, I know," she said, "for she idolizes the twin canaries. She is in love with one of them, but has not yet decided which, and she is equally fond of the other. You see, Lina, I think it one of the arduous duties of my sphere to make observations secretly about the *affaires du cœur* of the Athelston retainers. You've no idea how often my little romances turn out facts; and they—not the romances, but the heroes and heroines — need a little encouragement, which Lady Athelston is far too inert to give them. Poor lady! she forgets the time when for her 'we two' of the world were not exactly herself and her grown-up son. So, you see," continued Marjorie, still more easily, as Lina came toward the fire in her morning dress, "being so *au fait* in these matters, I understood exactly how Margaret would enjoy a little flirtation. Besides that, I understood how my dearly loved sister would enjoy a spicy gossip with our maid, sitting *en peignoir*, and growing happier and happier the more scandal Browne condensed into the time. Bah! isn't it an unwomanly thing — at least, I mean, isn't it a detestably womanly thing —to listen by the hour, with watering lips, while your servant tattles treachery about your own friends, lowering not only her and yourself, but lowering, too, all mistresses forever in the girl's eyes? And, besides that, I understood, Lina, how I myself should enjoy a quiet rest here until you came, and then a cheering talk with you, my little friend."

Marjorie had risen now, and was standing on the rug opposite Lina, her eyes unspeakably gentle and pitiful in their questioning.

"But—but I am so miserable!" cried Lina, impetuously, pushing her hair from her temples with the air of utter bewilderment which Marjorie had noticed before, and which it grieved

her inexpressibly to see, now that the white face was so full of helplessness and real despair.

"Have you failed?" asked Marjorie, in a whisper which sounded almost cheerful because she made such an effort to prevent its sounding hopeless.

"I—I have—more than failed; worse than failed."

"Then the letter is posted, Lina?"

"No," she answered, looking into Marjorie's eyes with a wide, startled gaze, "no; but Mr. Jelfrey has it."

"How was that?" asked Marjorie, letting no surprise appear either in her voice or eyes, for it really frightened her to see the terrible anguish on the face before her.

"I don't know yet," said Lina, very low, groping, as it were, in a great vacant darkness, and still gazing into Marjorie's eyes with the scared glance which seemed to search for some gleam of light to help her. "I left it in—the cottage; and before I reached here, he—overtook me, and—and he had the letter, he told me."

"But did not give it to you?" questioned Marjorie, still calmly, though the words sounded as if they came through her closed teeth.

"And I," continued Lina, as if she heard or saw nothing but that of which she was telling, "I forgot every thing and pleaded; but he would not—he would not, unless—"

"I see, dear," put in Marjorie, impulsively kissing the dark eyes which looked with such wild bewilderment into hers. "Don't look so, Lina. Let us talk of it quietly. Surely, surely we can frustrate *him*. Close your eyes; I can not bear their pain and fear. You mean," she went on, as she caressingly put Lina into the low chair and knelt upon the rug beside her, "you mean that he would not give it you unless you promised what he wished?"

"Yes," answered Lina, speaking sharply in her acute pain.

"And—don't be vexed with me, Lina, whatever I may ask—and is it impossible that you should do what he means?"

"I don't know. Oh! that is the hardest of all—*to know*," cried the girl, with a great tearless sob.

"I will not ask you," continued Marjorie, with her hands on the restless fingers clasped in Lina's lap, "why it would hurt you if that letter went. You told me this evening that you *feared* its going. That was enough for me to know then; that is enough for me to know now when I look into your eyes. It *would* hurt you if that letter went, and so we must prevent its going."

"Miss Castillain," whispered Lina, the words coming brokenly from her shaking lips, "it would not hurt me for the present only; it would wreck my whole life. Ah! you can never know what it is to be utterly alone in all the big, cold world; and how hard, being so, it is to earn a home. Oh, Miss Castillain, all my life would be wrecked, and—and—"

"I thought so," answered Marjorie, very softly. "It would wreck another life too. I read that in your face. Lina, you are sure my sister wrote it; not Mr. Jelfrey?"

"Lady Athelston told me Miss Castillain had 'kindly written' it for her," replied Lina, with slow unwillingness.

"Pooh!" cried Marjorie, with a ring of real contempt in her voice, "don't hesitate to tell of her to me. What a comfort that she did it kindly! At any rate, then, Lina, that letter must not go; and Mr. Jelfrey's conditions must not be met, whatever they are."

"But, Miss Castillain, I must tell you what they are," exclaimed Lina, still with the look of terrible suffering in her eyes. "Please let me tell you what they are, because I feel as if I groped so blindly, not knowing right from wrong; both are so terribly mixed."

Then Marjorie, seeing it would relieve and help the girl to tell even a little, said, with tenderness, just the words that Lina wanted,

"Yes, it will be better for you to tell me what he wants, dear; I," she added, "have known him so much longer than you have."

"No," interrupted Lina, with a quick catching of her breath. "But, Miss Castillain, how can I tell you what he said? You will hate me for repeating his words."

"No," returned Marjorie, earnestly; "never fear that any of his words can move me even to anger with *him*, let alone with you, dear. No, indeed, they can only make me despise him just a shade, perhaps, more heartily than I do now. Well, Lina, he says—?" she concluded, as a help to Lina in her reply.

"He said," breathed Lina, very low and slowly, "that he would not post that letter if I would promise to—to—would promise that Mr. Spendir should leave Highshire at once, quietly, without explanation to any one."

"I see—should leave suspiciously; yes, I see," assented Marjorie, her clear voice clearer than ever in its unutterable scorn; "should disappear—run away—yes, I see that distinctly. What else, Lina?"

"He said I must— Oh! I can not tell you!"

"I think I know," said Marjorie, gently. "It was about Sir Neil."

"Yes," answered Lina, her head drooping lower and lower, and her eyes, so dark in their sadness, wandering to the fire. "Oh, Miss Castillain, you can not know—you, of all the world!"

"It is just I of all the world who would be likely to know," returned Marjorie, calmly. "He wants you to give Sir Neil encouragement, as they call it. Don't flinch, dear; don't look so sadly shocked. I would never let words of Mr. Jelfrey's move me, if I were you. Lina, I've seen for a long time—for all this summer—that Sir Neil Athelston loves you. Don't interrupt me; the word is the right word, and I am the right one to tell you; at any rate," corrected Marjorie, with a great bravery in her shaking voice, "I choose to think so. Lina, I can see that Neil Athelston has never loved at all before this summer. I don't say what his love may be worth to any one; perhaps it too much depends on who the 'any one' is; but I know—and no one knows it as I know it—that he has never loved me as he loves you, and so I do him the justice to say that he can never have loved *any one* as he loves you. I know it; I can see it in his face always now; I can hear it in every tone of his voice when you are present. You see, I don't flinch from telling it; but that is nothing. The simple fact stands as I have said, and Eustace Jelfrey sees it. Lina, in spite of the abhorrence I see in your face for this subject, in

spite of your strong and natural dislike to Sir Neil Athelston, I have made you listen to this to prove to you that I understand that condition of Eustace Jelfrey's; and I know he will abide by it. I know he will hold to it like grim death."

"Why?" asked Lina, the vacant, wandering gaze once more fixed upon Marjorie.

"Why!" echoed Marjorie, speaking so lightly that no sign was visible of the scorn and contempt she felt. "Because Neil wants but the slightest encouragement from you to violate unhesitatingly the tie between himself and me, and that tie Eustace Jelfrey would use all his strength and skill to break at any cost."

A little light of comprehension broke upon Lina's face.

"I knew he admired you," she said, trying to understand; "but I thought he was—was going to ask your sister to marry him."

"Of course you did, and so he is," laughed Marjorie, "but only if his last scheme fails. This is his last scheme, and it must fail. We will frustrate both Mr. Jelfrey's conditions. You shall not persuade Mr. Spendir to leave Highshire; nor shall you let Sir Neil think that you love him, you poor little lonely girl!"

And Marjorie Castillain, in her large and generous sympathy, took the aching head within her arms, and actually shed warm tears above it.

"It is no wonder that I should try to help you, is it, Lina," she whispered, soothingly, "when I am the cause of the persecution you suffer?"

"Oh! indeed—indeed, you are not!" cried Lina, earnestly. "You say it because you are so good, but you don't know, and I can not tell you. Oh, Miss Castillain, what must you think of me?"

"Too much to tell you what it is," replied Marjorie, with ineffable gentleness.

"And you never ask me," Lina went on, sobbing, "you never ask me how I could get Mr. Spendir to go away from here; you never ask me what I know of him, what influence I have over him; you never suspect—"

"Never," returned Marjorie, hastily. "I trust you, Lina, because I could not help it if I tried. I can do nothing but trust you, dear. And as for him, does not Colonel Stuart trust him just as fully as I trust you? Doesn't he trust him because he knows him? And, knowing him, it seems natural to trust and to like him. Well, it is just as natural to me to trust and to like you. If you never tell me a word more than you have told me to-night I shall still have utter confidence in you, my little friend."

Then, still within Marjorie's warm and pitiful embrace, the girl—who could not even then tell the secret of her life—wept long and unrestrainedly; sobbing until the excited strength of the slight frame gave way. Marjorie let her weep and sob, only holding her close, and whispering soothing words now and then. And when she was exhausted—yet relieved, and Marjorie knew it—she told her it was bed-time; and moving softly about the room, in her beautiful flowing dress, and talking now quite easily and naturally, she brought at last one little gleam of hope to the white face which lay so wearily upon the cushion.

"Good-night," she whispered, bending until the roses in her hair touched Lina's eyelashes, and their perfume brought a momentary, inexplicable gladness thrilling through her, as the sudden scent of flowers often will. "Good-night. Don't think of this again until to-morrow, and then it will all look clearer and brighter, dear."

Hardly speaking, or accepting any help, when she went to her room, Marjorie waited until her sister had dismissed the maid (a right she always reserved to herself), arranged her pillows, and lain down. Then Marjorie came up to the bed, and, leaning with folded arms upon the carved foot-rail, looked at her sister with a pleading wistfulness which was new and strange on the gay, careless face.

Louisa was the beauty of the family—there never was any question about that—but never at her best had she looked beautiful just as Marjorie did then.

"Louie," she began, "I very seldom ask you to do me a favor—a particular, personal favor, do I?"

"Quite often enough, I think," replied Louisa, languidly.

"Will you grant me one to-night?" continued Marjorie, unheeding this interruption. "It will not hurt you. Indeed, in years to come you may thank me in your heart because you were persuaded to do it."

"Indeed!" interrupted Louisa, icily. "Perhaps I had better thank you now. I may have forgotten it in years to come."

"It will cost you no trouble, no loss, no self-denial even. Oh, Louisa, do say you will do it!"

"I'm not quite idiot enough to promise before I know what it is," returned Miss Castillain. "Speak out, if you want any thing, and make haste. Money, of course!"

"No," answered the younger sister, gently. "I may want money—I generally do—but I would not ask you for *that* as I ask you for this."

"Well, what is it, then?"

But Marjorie hesitated even yet to speak out, understanding her sister so well. So—though in her great earnestness it would have relieved her to come to the point at once—she leaned a little more forward on her arms, and slowly introduced her desired request, as she fancied it would be best received.

"We all know," she said, "what an immense power you possess over Eustace Jelfrey. He obeys every wish of yours, much to Emily Jorden's discomfiture; and he is always ready to follow your advice. Louie, will you use this great influence, which every body notices, to dissuade him from posting a letter which Lady Athelston has written to-day to London about Miss Chester?"

Marjorie, knowing who was the real writer of the letter, had too much tact and knowledge of her sister to venture to let such a knowledge appear, or to seem to suspect that Louisa could have even the smallest share in the transaction, except as an able auxiliary now in remedying the evil.

"Rubbish!" sneered Miss Castillain from her pillow, looking, with a supercilious smile, into her sister's anxious face, on which the fluctuating color came and went swiftly in this, to her, novel and unpleasant situation. "What business is it of mine what Lady Athelston may choose to do about her poor little paltry companion? We have quite enough of her down-stairs, I think,

without your dragging her into every conversation up here. I'm sick to death of her very name."

"If you will promise me this one thing," entreated Marjorie, "I will promise never to speak to you of her again—I will, indeed."

"Much I should believe you! Besides," added Miss Castillain, with an enjoyment of her sister's unusual and unfeigned earnestness, "would not it relieve you from your present painful position to know that the letter had been posted? Don't people generally post their letters the day they write them?"

"But I know—I mean," corrected Marjorie, with great suddenness, "sometimes Lady Athelston does not; and, if it is not posted—will you promise me it shall not go if it is not posted? I will take the other chance. Oh, Louisa! do promise me; you might just as well. Will you?"

"Might I just as well?" snapped the elder sister. "That is not exactly what I happen to think. The letter is posted; rest content with that. If it were not—"

"If it is not," cried Marjorie, the tears actually starting in her pleading eagerness, "you will prevent its being done? Louie, there isn't any thing you can ask me that I will not do for you, if you will only promise me this."

"Thank you, but I have no special desire either for your property or services," rejoined Miss Castillain, chillingly; "and I have not the faintest intention of doing what you ask. I hope I am too much of a lady—whatever you may be—to interfere in matters that are entirely personal and private matters of Lady Athelston's."

"But if Eustace Jelfrey isn't too much of a gentleman—I mean," faltered Marjorie, afraid of injuring her cause by her natural impetuosity, "if Eustace Jelfrey doesn't think it wrong to interfere, you need not, need you, Louisa? I shouldn't; I shouldn't, indeed," cried the girl, forgetting in her eagerness how little store Louisa ever set by her opinion on any point. "And you could do it so well. Will you?—will you? I ask you a favor so seldom, and I ask you this so urgently. Will you—if Eustace Jelfrey has the letter—prevent its being posted to-morrow?"

"On the contrary," replied Louisa, gazing with stony unconcern into her sister's face, "if you do tempt me to interfere at all in this affair, I shall do it just so far as to take especial care that Lady Athelston's letter *is* posted to-morrow, without fail; and posted in a way which it will be rather hard to circumvent. But I think," she added, watching with a keen enjoyment the very novel sight of her sister's patient forbearance, "I think, my dear, that you have no real cause to excite or distress yourself over such a trifle, as I am perfectly confident that the letter would be posted promptly and safely if it were left in Eustace Jelfrey's care. Does not that satisfy you?"

Marjorie, wondering vaguely, as she listened to this last speech, how far Louisa's deceit could go, but hardly knowing even that she thought of it, pleaded again with one last, brave struggle.

"Louie, you may be glad afterward if you promise me. You never can be glad that you refused. Do promise me! I will do any thing for you, and I will never say a word of this."

"Thank you; that is indeed kind," retorted Miss Castillain, with vicious suavity. "I should value your offer highly if I were accustomed to doing things about which I could fear your 'saying a word.' No, I have not yet fallen quite so low as that, whatever my sister may have done. Are you going to bed at all to-night, or are you going to lean there staring at me till morning?"

"Does it strike you, Louisa," asked Marjorie, a great, cold change coming over all her face, "that Neil Athelston would hardly relish the fact of Mrs. Esdaile's tutor posting his mother's letters, when the post-bags go from here; and that I may choose to tell him of it?"

"It is not very likely that you will," laughed Miss Castillain, in her thorough cruel confidence, "at least not if you do really care what becomes of that upstart girl. That would, of course, at once prove to Neil that she was an impostor, and he would soon turn her away then."

"Would he?" echoed Marjorie, ironically, but knowing, even better than her sister did, how little wisdom there would be in that plan she had hinted of. "I don't quite know whether he wouldn't turn you away first. Go to sleep; blessed and consolatory dreams no doubt await you; they always wait on innocence and purity and love. I dare say there are several now attending the couch of that masculine angel, Eustace. Oh, what a beautiful couple you and he will make—in a photograph! In real life," added the girl, musingly, as she twisted up her long brown hair, "I don't know but what I should be all the happier at a good wholesome distance from such a pair. I think I should be the gainer in purity of atmosphere."

"Don't you think," put in Louisa, with a calm enjoyment of the spite her speech contained, "that you are just a little bit idiotic to make this fuss about one of Lady Athelston's dependents until you are mistress of Lady Athelston's house? And don't you think, too, that your chance of becoming Lady Athelston yourself is rather slight while that low-bred girl stays here? It is plain to see that she could lure that foolish Neil to any thing. I advise you to show a grain or two of common sense in this matter, if you really *have* any to show. I, as your elder sister, advise you not to stand quite so thoroughly in your own light."

"And I advise you," cried Marjorie, in a voice of intense passion, while the big brown eyes flamed with anger under the hands which were still in her hair, "to remember that you are not speaking to such a one as your own contemptible, false-hearted self. And I advise you to remember that Neil Athelston is no fool; if he had been, he would have been lured, as you call it, to propose to you years ago, when you used every art you possess to tempt him. And I advise you to think, before you call Miss Chester low-bred, that she may rank miles above you presently—I hope she will. And I believe her birth has been as good as yours; and I know, and every body can see, that her words and acts are better than yours, even at your best. And as for her beauty, that is as far above yours as—as—"

Poor Marjorie faltered and failed lamely over her simile, for the natural and uncontrollable burst of passion had exhausted itself, and she felt the hot tears crowding to her eyes, as they always would after one of these rare, real outbreaks with her sister; real, because the girl's very heart was tempest-tossed with a fierce,

shamed misery; rare, because, as long as she had strength to curb the anger and hurt pride that burned within her, Marjorie avoided any retaliation upon her sister beyond the honest, hot rebuff, which was over in a few seconds, and left her comfortable and content.

So much stronger and higher in heart and mind was she than her sister, that it was but seldom she felt crushed, as she did now, by the malicious words and spiteful hints. Besides this, she was baffled and disappointed, too, of her desire, and knew she should have no comfort to give on the morrow, where she felt that comfort was sorely needed; so it was not wonderful that her hot, vehement speech was unfinished, and the scalding tears would have their way.

Louisa, catching sight of them, laughed pleasantly upon her pillow.

"Get into bed, Marjorie," she remarked, with amiable patronage, "and don't be such an arrant goose."

Marjorie did not retaliate then, though her eyes flashed through her tears. She extinguished the lights, and, drawing the heavy curtains from a narrow, deep-set window which had no shutters, looked out across the park, where she could but dimly descry the outlines of the great trees and the gigantic hills above and beyond. And, standing so, she wondered and wondered many things, though never for a moment, in her brave and simple confidence, did she doubt the truth and purity of the girl she was befriending.

"There is one effort I can make," she said to herself at last. "If that does not succeed, I—I suppose I must appeal to him. What a horrible lowering of my pride that will be! Yet I don't know," she mused, with a gleam of the old brightness—almost the old merriment—in her eyes; "nothing really lowers us but sin, so old nurses tell us, and sometimes they hit upon the truth, as Solomon did. I hope that's true, for to beg a favor of Eustace Jelfrey will be as bad to me as the Inquisition."

And, with this lucid simile and cheering thought, Marjorie turned away from the gloom and the chilly silence which that night surrounded High Athelston.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHERE THE LETTER WENT.

Mr. Johnson Mathers, stationer and postmaster of Churchill, sat writing at his desk, on the afternoon succeeding Lina Chester's night walk to the village post-office. It was by no means an unusual thing for Mr. Mathers to be seated at his desk, but it *was* an unusual thing for him to be entering three new books to the account of Miss Marjorie Castillain, of Hawkedale.

"The old gentleman doesn't allow her more than just what she's bound to spend on her dress." So said Churchill, and the *vox populi* was never nearer the truth.

"It is odd," ruminated Mr. Mathers, "that I should have chanced to lay those very books out on the counter before she came in that day, and that she should have remembered afterward that they were the books she wanted. It was a good chance hit of mine." And Mr. Mathers finished entering the order with complacency, knowing, of course, nothing about Marjorie's motives, or of how she had had to ransack her brain to recollect what books they were which she had noticed in the shop.

Mr. Johnson Mathers looked up from his desk as a lady came through the open glass door, then acknowledged the presence of Miss Marjorie Castillain with a bow.

The postmaster of Churchill was no sycophant; but with this little bow of his he always distinguished his county customers from those whom he could freely designate (as he often did in his letters to the local paper) as his "fellow-townsmen." He was a man who had read a good deal and thought a good deal, and upon that basis formed very radical opinions. Yet, for all that, he was never known to omit the deferential bow which he specially awarded to his county patrons.

"Your parcel, Miss Castillain, will be sent up at once—to High Athelston, I presume?"

"No," said Marjorie, a little perceptible hesitation in her pleasant voice, "I think I should like it sent home. We shall soon be returning to Hawkedale. But I did not come in now about that; I knew that would be all right. The fact is, I have just made a great mistake, and I want you to assist me in rectifying it."

Mr. Johnson Mather's spirits rose a little. Here was the nicest young lady in the county come to him for assistance, and *she* could never ask him any thing to which it would be against his principles to agree.

"I posted a letter in this office an hour ago, which I want to stop," said Marjorie, hastening on with her words. "The fact is, circumstances have arisen, since then, to make it of the utmost importance to me that the letter should not go. Mr. Mathers, will you give it back to me?"

Poor Marjorie! She thought that when once she had uttered the falsehood and the request, her greatest difficulty would be over. Surely the postmaster, though he might suspect her, would give her the letter. But she was to be grievously disappointed; the longing brown eyes read a calm and determined negative in his face.

"I am very sorry, Miss Castillain," he said, and there was a real regret in his tones, "but such a thing is impossible. I can not return a letter that has once been posted. I dare not, however much I might wish it."

"Dare not!" echoed Marjorie, in her ignorance. "Oh! but it's my own letter, and I want it back. No one else will know—no one else shall *ever* know—so no one can blame you for it."

"But you do not understand, Miss Castillain," returned the postmaster. "I am bound by an oath in my position here. I should be glad to do it for *you*, if I could do it for any one."

"But surely you could do that," pleaded Miss Castillain, with an earnestness which the Churchhill postmaster had never seen before in her merry eyes. "Just think what a little thing it is that I ask! Circumstances have arisen which make the posting of that letter a great mistake; and why may I not stop it, and prevent this mistake, which can not be corrected afterward, try as we may? Suppose I had burned it when I had first written it; no one would have done wrong, no one would have been to blame. Now, just because I—I have slipped it into your letter-

box, is it to be as entirely out of my reach as if it had never been mine? Does that make it a crime for me to retain it? Do give me the letter, Mr. Mathers!" the girl broke off, with quick entreaty.

"There are other ways of looking at the case, Miss Castillain," the postmaster said, very regretfully, but still with the quiet determination which said so much for the impracticability of the thing. "As I said, I am bound by an oath, and I can not do this if I would. But for that, indeed, I would. You should not have to ask me twice. As it is, I can not."

Looking into Miss Castillain's wistful eyes, Mr. Johnson Mathers saw them slowly fill with tears, which, without falling, clung to the long, dark lashes. Not only had he never seen them so before—few ever had—but he had not even imagined that the laughing eyes, which were so well known in Churchill, could soften with wistful, disappointed tears. He looked sideways out of his window. Strong and firm as his principles were, he felt it wiser not to meet those puzzled, persuasive eyes.

"Mr. Mathers, I think even the postmaster-general would not object to my having my letter back," she said, gently. "He couldn't, if he knew how much depended on it."

"I wish he had the question asked him instead of myself," was the somewhat unsteady answer, as Johnson Mathers still looked from the window, and wondered why his heart should beat so much more quickly when he tried to fancy what this girl's gratitude would be like.

"He would consent, I am sure," she put in, with anxious haste. "I will ask him some time if he could refuse—for I know him well. Or," she corrected herself, in her nervous anxiety, "or I will never speak of it. If you will do it, I will never tell."

"But that makes no difference, indeed, Miss Castillain," Mr. Mathers answered, turning with an effort once more to meet the pleading gaze. "I can not break my oath."

"Is there no way?" asked Marjorie, after a long, thoughtful pause. "Is there no way in which you can kindly oblige me?"

The postmaster folded the blotting-paper that lay on the counter, slowly and deliberately, his eyes fixed upon it; partly because to look up shattered his strong and steadfast resolution, partly because the thought he followed was engrossing him. When he did look up at last, Miss Castillain saw a change in his whole face; and she fancied then that, in spite of his apparent immovability, he had been really hurt to refuse her.

"Miss Castillain, to whom is your letter addressed?"

The answer came from her lips in a whisper, as if she feared that the very books had ears to hear.

"To Mrs. M'Mullen, No. 18 Berkeley Square, London, W."

"And you wish that it should not reach London?"

"I do, indeed. I am very anxious."

The brilliant eyes, in their sudden flash of hope, were not hard to meet now. Mr. Mathers thought, with his quiet smile, that it was very pleasant to feel them fixed upon himself.

"You wish to keep the letter in your own possession, Miss Castillain?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then I will do what shall insure its reaching your hands, and afterward you can treat it as you will. I hope no one else will ever make this request to me, but I will do it now. Will you address this envelope to yourself, while I look for the letter? 'Mrs. M'Mullen, No. 18 Berkeley Square.'"

As he repeated the address, he placed a large-sized envelope on the blotting-paper before Marjorie, and passed her the pen and ink. Just as she was writing her own name (and Mr. Mathers, beyond the opposite counter, was opening the letter-box), a gay, talkative party entered the shop. Marjorie heard the steps behind her, and coolly placed the blotting-paper over the envelope, rising slowly from her chair, and addressing the rector of Churchill in just as cool and gay a tone as if her heart had not been beating heavily with fear.

With the rector came his daughter, and Eustace Jelfrey, with little Jack Esdaile. Marjorie turned and spoke, and shook hands with each, though she would not stir from that spot, nor remove her one hand from the blotting-paper. By the time Mr. Jorden needed the services of the master of the shop, those services were at his disposal. Mr. Mathers was as far as possible from the letter-box, coolly packing the books for Miss Castillain.

"Are you coming our way, Miss Marjorie?" asked the rector, when their business was over, while Jelfrey awaited her answer with subdued eagerness.

"Not yet, Mr. Jorden. I have promised to wait here until the carriage passes to High Athelston. I had two or three errands to do in the town, but I can not walk any farther. I am quite tired now."

"You are still staying at High Athelston?" inquired Mr. Jorden.

"Yes. We shall be there a few days longer. So you did return to your duties this morning, Mr. Jelfrey, after all?"

Bright and quizzical was her glance at Jelfrey; and he answered gayly, knowing so little what had brought her there.

"I felt that my leave had expired. I would not on any account abuse Mrs. Esdaile's lenity, though Sir Neil Athelston was good enough to persuade me (and Colonel Stuart seconded him) to stay as long as his other guests."

"Sir Neil is always hospitable," remarked Marjorie, lightly. "Good-bye, Emily. I'm sorry I can not walk with you."

But Emily Jorden was not sorry at all, and Marjorie smiled as she read this fact, and watched Miss Jorden walking away gladly at Eustace Jelfrey's side.

"Now," said Marjorie to herself, drawing a great breath of relief when they were gone, "now it will be all right."

When she turned in from the door, the postmaster had gone again to the letter-box. Though he was only a small shop-keeper in a small town, he was too courteous to be standing near her, after having overheard the excuses she had uttered. She finished the address on the envelope, writing with intense care, in fine, pointed letters, exactly as her sister would have done.

"Is this it, Miss Castillain?" asked Mr. Mathers, holding Louisa's letter toward her, and crit-

ically comparing the handwriting of the two addresses.

"That is it," she answered, with a catch in her voice, as she saw him examine the writing.

He put the letter, without another word, into the large envelope she had addressed to herself; then he stamped it, and replaced it in the letter-box.

"Now, Miss Castillain," he said, evidently glad to have pleased her, yet as evidently not quite free from self-blame, "you will receive that letter by to-morrow morning's post, and will, of course, do what you like with it. I have not let it out of my hands, but I am glad to say I have been able to accommodate you. Your parcel shall be sent up at once," he added, with quick tact, "for I see the boy now coming down the street."

But though he had said this to set her at ease, he knew that he would not for any thing have missed her few earnest words of thanks. The boy came in, and was dispatched at once (and rather demonstratively) to Hawkedale, with Miss Castillain's books; and Miss Castillain herself sauntered to the door, and gazed down the steep street. But she had done this several times before she saw the beautiful bays, in their dazzling harness, trotting in from High Athelston, Neil himself driving them, and Ridley, with folded arms, beside him.

Mr. Mathers came out to assist Miss Castillain to her seat, and she thanked him with one of her bright, quick smiles. But Colonel Stuart had left his place at the back of the long, luxurious wagonette, and there was no need of other help for Marjorie. Ridley closed the door behind them; Louisa significantly moved aside her dress to let her sister pass; Neil looked round from his high seat, and asked, "All right?" Marjorie nodded up at him from the seat which she had been forced to take, and then the bays went stepping on daintily up the street and out into the London road.

"What an odd coincidence!" ruminated Mr. Johnson Mathers, as he turned back into his shop. "I'm glad to have been able to do it for her in some sort of manner, but I don't suppose there's any one else in the county for whom I could have done it. And that's not because she's going to be Lady Athelston of High Athelston, for it's not for my lady or Sir Neil that I would have done what I've done to-day. And she wasn't ashamed of thanking me there before them all just as she would have thanked any one of them. She's always that way. If she had been so only just because I had done what she asked me to do, I'd not have thought of it one second, or valued it one grain; but she's always so; being, I take it, a lady in her heart, apart from her money and her position, and all that. She little thinks how that kindliness and pleasantness which come natural to her have returned to her to-day in this favor which she begged of me. I'm glad," continued the postmaster, philosophically, "that she does *not* know. It comes straight from the goodness of her heart, and it's pleasant to think she imagines that whatever we do for her comes straight from the goodness of *ours*."

Next morning, with very skillful haste, Marjorie put into her pocket unopened the one letter which the High Athelston post-bag contained for her, and after breakfast started alone across the park. She had promised to meet Lina Chester near the cottages in Nether Lane, but, before she reached them, Eustace Jelfrey, riding with his pupil, overtook her.

"Is not this a beautiful autumn day, Miss Marjorie?" he said, dismounting with prompt courtesy, and speaking in his softest tones, as he walked on beside her.

"Why, Jack," she exclaimed, only acknowledging Mr. Jelfrey's greeting with a cold smile, "you have perpetual holidays, I think! Where are you going now?"

"Home—to lessons, unfortunately," answered the boy. "Come with us, Marjorie, and make them jolly."

"They will be sure to be jolly, in any case, Jack," she said, with a side-glance at the tutor. "How many hours have you studied already to-day?"

"Oh, two or three; quite enough, I think, for the whole day; but Mr. Jelfrey is so dreadfully strict about studies when he is at it."

"Quite natural, too," assented Marjorie, "seeing how very often he is *not* at it."

"Those holidays which the boy enjoys so much," said Jelfrey, in a low, plausible tone, "are valueless to me, Miss Castillain. The only thing that could make leisure enjoyable for me no leisure gives me."

"Do you not enjoy any of the occupations of your leisure time?" asked Marjorie, looking fully and calmly into his face; "not even those occupations which make your leisure so fortunate for others?"

"I do not understand you," said Jelfrey, his voice quite calm, though the scarlet mounted slowly to his very hair.

"I think you do," she returned, in the slow, grave voice which always baffled him, because he never understood whether it was fun or sarcasm, "I think you do. Jack," she continued, turning gayly to the boy, and laying her hand on his pony's neck, "ride on now, fast. I want to come slowly, and enjoy to the very fullest the beauty of this wonderful day. Good-bye."

And when she had succeeded in dismissing them, Marjorie laughed low and clearly, as she lingered behind among the flickering sunbeams and soothing shadows, a great enjoyment shining in the depths of her bright eyes.

"Discomfited!" she said to herself merrily, "decidedly discomfited; and such a result is worthy my greatest efforts."

Then Marjorie, still with the laughter on her lips and in her eyes, sat down upon the hedge-bank and waited for Lina, while the brown leaves fell upon her from the elms above.

When Lina came into sight, Miss Castillain rose at once and joined her, talking bright little commonplaces as they walked on together under the autumn trees.

"Lina," she said, easily and coolly, as they came in sight of the two white cottages, "I have the letter for you. Here it is. I have had no trouble about it; don't imagine that I have. It was all quite easy, and so you need not ask me any thing about it, for it is not worth telling of."

Not only did Marjorie, in her simple, deep generosity, make thus light of her own act, but so amusedly, yet so gently did she receive Lina's broken thanks, that somehow it ended for them both in a cheery little laugh. Yet for all that,

Marjorie's trusting confidence in acting thus, and her bright, delicate tact in treating her own part so lightly and Lina's part so openly, went deep down into the heart of the lonely girl, and stirred its very depths with a gratitude which nothing had ever roused before through all her life.

"You are going in to speak to Mr. Spendir, aren't you?" inquired Miss Castillain, as she hesitated at the gate of Mrs. Cheere's cottage. "How long do you think you shall be? I will time my visit to Dorcas accordingly. We may just as well walk back together as separately; mayn't we?"

"I shall only be a few minutes, Miss Castillain," answered. Lina, nervously, knowing that Marjorie had decided to call upon Dorcas only to make her feel at liberty to go next door, and really almost bewildered in her gratitude.

"I need not stay longer than half an hour," said Miss Castillain. "If that will suit you, you will be here again in that time?"

"Yes; thank you."

Marjorie smiled at the thanks, but her face was sad and pitiful, too, when she entered Mrs. Cheere's neat and stiff little parlor.

A very dull call it was, accompanied by complaints in every key; and it was more in the hope of a change than from any desire to obtain information that Marjorie turned the conversation at last to the artist and his boy.

"I don't understand any thing about their goings-on," remarked Dorcas, her head at a stately elevation. "They seem to be as poor as they can be, and yet, all the time, they sing as if the world was their own."

"Do they?" asked Marjorie, absently, wondering whether the grievance to Dorcas was their poverty, or their singing in defiance of it.

"Do they? Indeed they do," she echoed, with scornful emphasis; "and when they are not singing they are up to other spurtlements—laughing, or playing games, or whatever they call it."

"What should you call it, Mrs. Cheere?" inquired the girl, deferentially, hoping her question would elicit another unusual term.

"I call it disturbing a peaceable neighbor," retorted Dorcas; "that's what I call it, Miss Castillain. I know I and my little girl never made such noises, and there never are such noises in my house."

"Are they never still, then, next door?"

"Hardly to say ever quite still," explained Dorcas. "If the father's working, the child's reading aloud by the hour, or telling him stories, or playing fiddles; or they're both whistling, or —oh, it's always something or other, and then they have such odd visitors."

"Have they? And no visitors that are not odd?" asked Marjorie, an inexplicable blush rising as she spoke.

"Too many, I should think, considering what a barn it is to ask respectable people into," answered Dorcas, with a relish. "There's the colonel comes often and often, and stays long enough too, I should think, when there isn't a comfortable chair, so to be called, in the place."

"Yes?" questioned Marjorie, rousing herself, after the pause which followed Mrs. Cheere's words.

"Oh, plenty more, Miss Castillain, though I can't be expected to say what sort. Lady Athelston's companion, as they call her—though I wonder my lady likes to be a companion of *hers* —she comes now and then in a sly, dark way. I can't bear to see it—I, a respectable woman! If I'd thought my little girl would do such a thing—"

"As call to see Mr. Spendir in the dusk, you mean?" asked Marjorie, gently, as the woman paused to wipe her eyes.

"I don't like her," put in Dorcas, with unexpected vigor; "I never liked her. She always looked too ladyfied for her place. But I've liked her less since I've seen her come to speak to that man next door" (it was rarely that Dorcas condescended to give the artist any other designation), "when quiet, orderly folks were in their own rooms."

"I would do it any day, Mrs. Cheere, and never think harm of it, either," put in Marjorie, audaciously. "Does he have other visitors, did you say?"

"I've seen the tutor from The Anchorage go in at the gate," rejoined Dorcas, rather stonily; "and he's been sitting in here before now, waiting for the man to come in."

"In here?" ejaculated Miss Castillain, now really astonished.

"Yes, in here, Miss Castillain; rather pleasanter, I should think, it was for him, too, than in that place. Thank goodness, I *have* got chairs that I can ask you and him and such-like to sit on, without feeling ashamed of myself."

"I hear Miss Chester's voice now, I think," said Marjorie, gently, as she rose. "She has been in next door, and I should like to catch her, that we may walk home together. Good-bye. You will see me to-morrow with the paper."

Hardly could Dorcas articulate her good-bye, so surprised and puzzled was she by the fact of Miss Castillain not only countenancing the visits of Lady Athelston's companion to that man next door, but actually joining her afterward, anxious to walk back with her.

Standing at the window, but out of sight, Dorcas gazed eagerly upon the meeting of the two girls; and her breath quickened to a dangerous degree when she saw that "that man" was there too, and that Miss Castillain's first act, when she joined them, was to give him her hand with a smile which made her look beautiful even to the gloomy, prejudiced eyes of the solitary and imbittered woman who looked surreptitiously on the scene.

"Mr. Spendir," Marjorie said, feeling the color rise and the tears start as she met the look of strange, quiet earnestness which beautified the artist's face while he stood out there in the sunshine, "I've had my usual shindy with Dorcas —I mean I've had an engagement with Dorcas, as usual. I can not think how you escape. I thought every body who came near her had to join in a continual skirmish. And I understand that you always get the worst of it, unless you show an enormous amount of pluck—I mean a great amount of energy; and defy her—defy her to the death! I hope you do that?"

"*You* do not, Miss Castillain," Fitz said, not understanding that her speech was uttered only as a hint to him that he must do so if he wanted any peace.

"Oh, I do," laughed Marjorie, "only I like first to listen to her. She teaches me one or

two new words every time I hear her. It's as good as a play. Isn't it what King Charles said of Parliament discussing the Divorce Bill? Now, Lina, shall we walk back together?"

"I am ready," said Lina, looking brighter than she had looked for many days. And then Marjorie shook hands with the artist, a strange inexplicable comfort for him in her voice and face and hand-shake.

"Miss Castillain," began Lina, as they went slowly along the shadowy lane, "I seem to want to tell you many things, and yet—I can not."

"Don't try," returned Marjorie, tersely.

"I know I can never repay you in any way," said Lina, with a sob in her voice.

"Oh, what joyful tidings!" cried Marjorie, laughingly. "You couldn't have told me any thing more to your own credit, Lina—not any thing. Don't you know how 'base is the slave that pays?'"

And then they walked on merrily, talking of other things; while Fitz went slowly back into the empty house, and, standing before the fire, watched the burning into ashes of a square, unopened letter, with the arms of the Athelstons in vermilion on the seal.

He watched the faint and feathery ashes disperse and die; then, with a long-drawn sigh, breathed unconsciously, he sat down to his drawing, softly singing the last verse of "Tom Bowling"—softly singing it again and again, as if that, too, came from his lips unconsciously.

CHAPTER XVII.

BAFFLED.

SEPTEMBER and October had passed. Lady Athelston, once or twice during the two months, had questioned Lina about the lady with whom she had lived in Berkeley Square, but had never, to Lina herself, expressed any surprise at her letter remaining unanswered. By no one else was it ever mentioned. So the life of those autumn months was undisturbed, and a light-hearted girl would have forgotten that she had been upon the brink of a precipice from which she recoiled with such a fear and trembling. But Lina Chester was not a light-hearted girl, and there ever seemed to hover over her a shadow, "faint yet pursuing."

There is no need to go back and tell how these two months had passed; let the sequel show it.

The early breakfast-bell at Hawkedale had clanged through the house half an hour ago, yet still Mr. Castillain and his elder daughter were taking the meal alone in that dingy breakfast-room, from which the chill was hardly banished by the small fire burning in the grate.

"What time did you get home last night, or, rather, this morning?" inquired the squire, looking up sharply from his primitive rasher.

"We left High Athelston soon after one, papa. The party broke up at midnight, but you know that Lady Athelston and Neil always like us to wait as long as we can."

"Stupid things, these perpetual parties they keep up," grumbled the squire: "stupid and extravagant."

"We need not go if you disapprove of them, papa," rejoined his daughter, dutifully. "Marjorie enjoys them so much that I go for her sake; but perhaps, if you forbid her, she will listen to you. Of course, I have no power over her."

"Let her alone," returned Mr. Castillain, all the more pettishly as he knew his daughter understood how little this proceeding would suit his tactics. "But I can not have this idleness encouraged in the house. I declare she shall have no breakfast at all, unless she can be down at the proper hour."

"I am forever reminding her, and begging her to be in time," observed Louisa, plaintively, "but it's no use. Being an hour or two later at night never makes any difference to me."

"Because you're a sensible girl," remarked the old squire, eying his daughter proudly, and feeling what a true Castillain she was.

"A very sensible girl," assented Marjorie, entering the room at that moment; "I wish she wasn't."

"I'll tell you what *I* wish," snapped her father, "and that is, that you would be ready for your meals when your meals are ready for you."

"Not on the morning after a fearfully late dinner-party," said Marjorie, coolly, as she took her seat. "I hate the morning after a party, and I curtail it as much as possible. I think it altogether a mistake to get up until the next day but one."

"Whatever makes you look so queer, Marjorie?" drawled her sister. "You look as if you had been crying all night. Had you any mortification at High Athelston, through that companion of Lady Athelston's?"

If Louisa Castillain *could* have been made to feel ashamed of herself, she would most likely have felt it when her sister's eyes met hers after this speech; but such a feeling was impossible to her, and the strange, questioning look on Marjorie's face—so unusually pale this morning—drew from her just a hard little laugh, and nothing more.

Then Marjorie—half in hurt defiance, and half in the effort to hide that her eyes were swollen and her lips unsteady—talked on coolly, as she always could when she was most restless and most pained.

"Papa, when shall you give a return ball to the Athelstons? You see we have been there so often lately, and their ball is this day week—the day of your clothing-club tea, Louie. What two blessed ordinances to fall on one day! We must have a grand ball in return, papa; when shall it be?"

The squire's sharp and conclusive "never" was only just the answer which Marjorie had expected. But she raised her eyebrows with as much astonishment as if she had had a deeper motive in the conversation than the desire to distract him, and to amuse herself.

"Christmas would be the best time for us to have it," she resumed, idly, as she buttered a finger of toast; "but we can think of it presently. In the mean time, I must have a little money, please. I can not go to the High Athelston ball without a new dress."

"Rubbish!" sneered the squire. "You've dresses enough, I should think."

"But you think incorrectly," rejoined Marjorie, placidly; "I've nothing fit to wear."

"You ought to be ashamed to say it," an-

swered her father, pushing back his chair angrily. "You have your allowance, and you must make it do. What did I tell you last year, when your expenses went beyond your income?"

"It wasn't so much that my expenses went beyond my income," she returned, calmly glancing at him as she held her tea-cup in her hand, "as that my income failed to cover my expenses."

For a moment the squire drew in his lips to curb a laugh, but his next question was captious enough.

"And what did I tell you then, I say?"

"You said it must never occur again. I therefore wish to give you an early opportunity of preventing it, sir."

"You may depend on this, Marjorie: what you have is all you will have, until you are married, and can look to some one else to encourage your extravagance."

"But, my dear sir," spoke Marjorie, looking into her father's face with comic gravity, "you will never get us off your hands if we go out into society ugly and shabby."

"Pray don't talk of 'us,'" put in Miss Castillain; "I can make my income suffice, and always look well."

"Oh, model daughter of a model parent!" cried Marjorie, with eyes uplifted.

"As long as your sister dresses uncomplainingly on her allowance, I can not think how you dare grumble," cried Mr. Castillain, hotly.

"Louie saves such a lot out of the household expenses," said Marjorie, quietly, her eyes and thoughts apparently engrossed by the egg she was breaking.

For the first time the color rushed into Louisa's face—the angry, resentful color. "Such a suspicion is like you, Marjorie," she stammered.

"Very like me," assented Marjorie, promptly, "and the act is very like you. Papa, can you give me something that shall be equivalent to Louisa's scrapings out of the housekeeping? It is worth quite a hundred a year to her."

Louisa Castillain was not often taken at a disadvantage, but in the surprise of this sudden and correct statement she was oddly silenced.

"I don't believe it," snapped the squire, perfectly satisfied with his elder daughter's care and economy. "I only believe that her taste is not so ridiculously extravagant as yours. Bless me, at what will girls stop nowadays!"

"At nothing, sir," rejoined Marjorie, readily.

"I think not, indeed. Girls were very different when I was young."

"I expect they always did their best, even in those faultless days, to look well according to their means, sir; and I always think there is one bit in 'The Vicar of Wakefield' which wars against nature. You remember where the two girls come in gorgeously dressed for church, and the Vicar remonstrates with them so effectually that they 'go with great composure' that very instant to change their dresses. If Goldsmith had had grown-up daughters of his own, he never would have written that."

"That is your idea, is it?" asked her father, with a sneer.

Marjorie gazed meditatively into his face as she answered,

"'Them's my noätions, Sammy, wheerby I meäns to stick.' Now, what are you going to allow me extra, papa?"

"Nothing," replied the squire, crossly, as he went round to the fire.

Marjorie's quizzical eyes followed him. "'Thou art so near—and yet so far,'" she sung, audaciously. "I ought to be allowed to take the shine out of Louisa now and then," she went on, presently, in a pleasant, unvexed tone. "Don't make faces at me, Louie; I hope it *was* slang. You see, papa, Louisa has the beauty always, so it is but fair that she should give place to me on rare occasions. When I have a new dress, I can manage to carry off the palm at a ball, and I do so like to make new conquests."

"You hope your new acquaintances will like you better than the old ones who know you better, I suppose," put in Louisa.

"Not so much that," rejoined Marjorie, with a whimsical glance at her father, "as because I'm tired of the old conquests."

"And so you take up a different order altogether," sneered Miss Castillain.

"I advise you, Marjorie," struck in the squire, turning sharply to her, "just to take care how you try to play fast and loose with *one* of your conquests, as you call them. If you lose him, it will be the same as losing every friend you have."

"I'm sure to lose him without the attraction of a new dress," sighed Marjorie. "I feel it over me like a covering, as Mrs. Fry has it in her book."

"You must go looking well," returned her father, shortly, "looking as well as your sister; but you must do it on your own allowance. Others can."

"Oh, what a cram!" cried the girl, with a good-humored shrug of her shoulders; for which gesture, as well as for the forbidden term, she offered no sort of apology.

"Really, Marjorie," began her sister, "papa has so often prohibited that style of—"

"Look here, papa," struck in his younger daughter, debonnairly, "Neil Athelston has fallen hopelessly in love with his mother's companion, and I expect I shall have to be the one to 'break it gently to his mother.' Won't there be a scene!"

The squire gazed at her, incredulous and bewildered. Was this one of her random speeches only? Or was it the utterance of a horrible doubt which had been lately hovering vaguely about him?

"I'm not a bit surprised," she continued, quietly setting down her empty cup. "No man could have resisted her last night when she sung 'The Blind Girl to her Harp.' Louisa, didn't she look beautiful, perfectly beautiful, at that harp of Lady Athelston's? I wonder whether her ladyship ever played it as well, and I wonder who taught Miss Chester? I shall be obliged to have lessons."

"It strikes me you are talking an inexcusable amount of rubbish," interrupted Mr. Castillain, snappishly. "What does that girl—only a kind of upper servant in the house, after all, though I've nothing to say against her—what does she want coming forward as she does, and being made so much of?"

"She amuses and entertains Lady Athelston. What higher mission could a girl have? and she's paid to do it, don't you know?" returned Marjorie. "I'm only telling you how her beauty and her voice struck me—and others, too; but, then,

she was not the only beautiful girl there. Louie looked very well—exceedingly well—and sung well, too, appealing to the audience with, 'Oh, say not woman's heart is bought!' There wasn't any one there who would have been impolite enough to say it; but still it was wise to be on the safe side. And after *that*, you should have heard Eustace Jelfrey requesting us to 'Oh! leave him to his sorrow!'"

"By heavens, Marjorie!" interposed the squire, getting very red in the face, "you can be an utter idiot when you like! What has all this to do with Neil Athelston and yourself? Did you make yourself disagreeable?"

"I?" questioned Marjorie, with slow astonishment. "Oh no; I always make myself agreeable to Neil. That's why I am jealous of Miss Chester, and that's why I was so anxious to sing 'I wish I didn't love him, or that he loved me.'"

"Marjorie, how very vulgar some of your ideas are!" drawled Louisa, as she rose from her seat.

"But I resisted the temptation," concluded Marjorie, musingly, "and enjoyed myself as much as I always do—with Neil."

"Of course you do," assented her father, in a quick tone of relief, "and of course you always will, though you talk a great deal of rubbish and buffoonery. Now, don't let me hear any thing more of Miss Chester's absurd ambition; I hope you know your own position too well even to notice it. Mind you go to that ball looking as you ought to look. You can afford it well enough."

Uttering which genial and generous command, Mr. Castillain left the room.

"Poets have written, and minstrels have sung 'A Father's Love,'" laughed Marjorie, as the door closed behind him, but its depths have not quite been sounded yet."

The sisters were standing opposite each other at the fire now, Marjorie with one foot on the fender, and her shoulder against the chimney-piece; and Louisa upright on the rug, selecting various keys from the little basket in her hand.

"Before you go, Louie," said her sister, with a sudden change to that gentle wistfulness which seemed as much to belong to her winning voice as its gayety did, "I want to ask you one question. When we were at High Athelston last night, Lady Athelston told me that you had been writing again for her about Miss Chester, having been tired of waiting for an answer to your last letter. Is this true?"

"Quite true," assented Miss Castillain, setting the key-basket down upon the table again, and showing nothing of surprise.

With a strong effort, Marjorie checked the words that rose to her lips, and uttered very different ones.

"Why?" she asked, quite gently. "Was not one letter enough?"

"We can not tell until we know the result of the second one," answered Louisa, chillily.

"Do you think it didn't reach London?"

"How can I tell?" asked the elder sister. "If it were not that—that I know who posted it, I should say there had been foul play."

"From whom?"

"From Miss Chester, or her accomplices—whoever they may be."

"But you *do* know who posted it, and so that is impossible," returned Marjorie, calmly.

She paused a little, then continued with strange earnestness,

"Louie, is that—that second letter gone?"

"Yes."

"And—" the girl's eyes had a dark, sad passion in them, but still she was gentle in all she said—"and again it has been posted by some one you know, and can depend upon?"

"Yes," replied Miss Castillain, jingling her keys with idle nonchalance.

"You are quite sure it is too late to stop it?"

"Quite; even if any one were deceitful enough to wish it stopped."

"Are you never afraid, Louisa, that the wrong you do to others will be visited on yourself—as it is written?"

The low, pained words were uttered without faltering, but the strange passion which darkened her sister's eyes bewildered, and for a moment almost frightened, Miss Castillain.

"Marjorie would have stopped that letter if she could," she thought to herself, as she made her way to the store-room. "What a good thing that Eustace and I got it off so cleverly the day before yesterday! I wish Lady Athelston had not got gossiping about it to her—it's just like the stupid old thing."

Then Louisa, with her senses all about her, met (and shortened) the demands of the cook, who was housekeeper, and the old man-servant, who was butler and footman in one; while, in the dingy breakfast-room, Marjorie still stood against the chimney-piece, with her face hidden in her hands, and her eyes aching in their tears.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SHADOW CAST BEFORE.

At the unpainted old wooden gate which led into the kitchen-garden at Hawkedale stood Marjorie Castillain, on the day of the Athelston ball. She was dressed for walking, but she lingered here in the face of the cutting November wind, and with nothing more attractive to gaze upon than an old gardener sweeping the dead leaves into heaps.

There was a thoughtfulness in the girl's face and attitude, though, with which the old gardener and the dead leaves had nothing to do; but this all changed and vanished suddenly when her sister's voice reached her, and Miss Castillain herself strolled into sight round the corner of the house.

"Come, Marjorie, what are you staring at?"

"A most curious spectacle," rejoined Marjorie, without turning her eyes, or moving from her leaning posture against the gate. "You see that ancient recruit of the squire's, and you see that he hasn't a single hair on his head. Well, a few minutes ago he wanted his knife—a great old four-bladed implement—and where do you think he took it from? Out of his cap. Just fancy carrying that trifle on his bald head!"

"Dear me, Marjorie, you always seem to me to be remarking on bald heads," said her sister. "It was only yesterday you told me that the trees in November, with a few leaves sticking here and there, reminded you of a bald-headed man. I never heard such ridiculous similes."

"Except from me," smiled Marjorie, good-

humoredly. "What do you want with me, Louisa?"

"I'm going to the school-room now, to see the clothing-club purchases. Are you ready?"

"I'm not going," rejoined Marjorie, almost sadly. "Of what use am I?"

"Never mind that. You ought to go," rejoined Miss Castillain, promptly.

"No, I oughtn't," her sister answered, as promptly.

"Yes, you ought, Marjorie. Every body says you ought to help me in these good works; and it is really wicked of you to neglect them as you do."

"Don't preach to me," put in Marjorie, with cheerfulness.

"If I don't tell you what you ought to do, I don't know who will," said Louisa, stonily. "I don't know who else would take the trouble, for such a thankless return."

"Have you finished?" asked Marjorie, turning to her, with raised eyebrows. "I don't value your sermons an atom, Louie; I feel, on the whole, more pious without them; and I'm not going to the schools. I don't want a walk. I'm reserving my complexion for the ball."

"I shall tell Neil that to-night," said Louisa, with her unpleasant little laugh. "And I wouldn't tell falsehoods if I were you. You told some of the women that you should go to see their things to-day."

"Ah! so I did," was the bright answer. "Come along—I'm ready."

"And you are going that way, are you?" inquired Miss Castillain, with a glance at her sister's garden-hat and old leather gauntlets.

"In these gloves, you mean? Of course I am. I never feel quite happy unless I have a pair of these on hand."

"I don't care," grumbled Louisa, as they went on together. "If you choose to look a fright, I can't help it."

"No one would ever think, would they," questioned Marjorie, gravely, "that I was the daughter of a millionaire? I hope he will get to hear public opinion so expressed. How dare he allow me only such a pittance, and call it enough? How dare he refuse to give me ever so little extra, when I entreat, as a week ago I entreated, for a dress to wear to-night?"

"Well, I am sure you are coming out quite gorgeous enough, after all," put in Louisa, a little spitefully.

"Of course. I've mortgaged to a tremendous extent, though, to obtain that pleasing result. *Now* if I don't make a sensation, I know it will be through your bringing me out into this cutting wind, to destroy my complexion, and make my nose red."

"Perhaps some propitious fate will lure Miss Chester out, too, on this all-important day," suggested Louisa, with her hard laugh.

"Nothing could destroy Miss Chester's complexion," asserted Marjorie, generously, "nor make her nose red; and if you think for a moment that I ever dream of rivaling *her*, Louisa, you are wildly mistaken."

"Of course not. Your friendship for Lady Athelston's companion is just the romantic and delightful friendship of two people who have one strong taste in common, and pursue one noble end. Wait until the noble end has to make a choice."

"'O jest unseen, inscrutable, invisible, as a nose on a man's face, or a weather-cock on a steeple!'" said Marjorie, laughing heartily. "Here we are! What a pity! We might have enjoyed a few more piquant and spicy little jokes."

The afternoon was drawing to a close when Marjorie caught sight, from the school-room window, of Lina Chester walking alone over the fields toward High Athelston. The women's tea was over. Marjorie had done her part in amusing and providing for them, and now she slipped away and joined Lina.

"I'm so glad," she said, taking her hand; "I want a walk, and I will go a little way with you."

Something in Marjorie Castillain's manner to her for the last week had been new to Lina, and puzzled her a good deal. There were a tenderness and pitifulness in it, as if some sorrow were felt for her which she could not feel for herself. Ah! how could it be otherwise, when Marjorie knew how cunningly her sister had done her cruel work at last, and that that discovery which Lina dreaded might happen now on any day?

"Have you been to the school, then, Miss Castillain?"

"Yes, officiating at Louisa's clothing-club festival, which was a most depressing success."

"Did you aid in the depression or the success, Miss Marjorie?" asked Lina, laughing.

"I didn't know what to do. Louisa said I must go, so I went; but I could only conduct myself according to my dim lights, trying on the shawls and pouring out the tea. I should have come off with flying colors if there had been sufficient breeze to fly them, which is, being interpreted, if I'd been sufficiently appreciated."

Glancing down into her companion's face, Marjorie paused a minute, as if her lips longed to utter other words; but at that instant Lina looked up with a smile, and then Marjorie resumed her light tones.

"You should have seen one old woman, Lina; you would have laughed. She took her place at my table with the most resigned and absorbed expression of countenance, and then, sighing very plaintively, helped herself to cake. While she gave me a melancholy recital of her widowhood, she slid the cake into her lap, and pocketed it; and this she did over and over again, sighing each time more and more heavily, and looking more and more lugubrious; yet each time I handed her the cake she helped herself to the largest piece with much humility. Oh, Lina, I did wonder how far south her pocket extended! Will you come with me across the meadow, and out into Nether Lane—to Mr. Spendir's cottage?"

The question was asked so suddenly, that it was no wonder Lina hesitated.

"Do come," urged Marjorie. "I have a request I want to make; and you know the little boy has been ill; I want to ask after him. Oh, Lina, it has been almost more than I could bear to go and see him through his fever, and to find him always, always reading aloud to his father when he was able. Such funny books too! I can't think where they got them, unless at the second-hand place in Churchill. And there was the father always sitting at his work, ready to listen and sympathize and talk, but always busy. I know he works too hard. He is etching borders in Miss Jorden's album now, and putting so

much beautifully fine work in them, for hardly any payment, I know; and all the time the boy reads on and on. Oh, Lina, what a funny life it is for them! Think of *his* education, and of Jack Esdaile's; and yet I know the artist's boy has the better tutor. How I wonder what their lives will be!"

"They are all marked out for them, I suppose," said Lina, gently.

"Oh, hush!" cried Marjorie, in hasty earnestness. "That's a terrible idea; don't promulgate it. My one consolation at night is that to-morrow *may* bring forth any thing."

And so, talking of every thing but that one sad subject which was uppermost in Marjorie's mind, they reached the cottage.

Miss Castillain's errand to Mr. Spendir was to ask him to give her a few lessons in drawing; and Lina stood by, in wondering silence, to hear him pleasantly and courteously refuse.

"I really could not do it, Miss Castillain, however much I wished," he said. "I have seen a drawing of yours far better than any of mine, and—"

"And what, Mr. Spendir?" she asked, quizzically.

"And this wish," he said, the scarlet rising slowly in his dark face, "is only a continuance of the kindness you have shown us all through Jet's illness. "I can not help understanding it so."

"This is too bad, when I had set my heart upon it," fretted Marjorie; "and I have been saving on purpose. If you only knew the difficulty of saving on a small allowance, Mr. Spendir, you would value my efforts."

Again the red rushed over the artist's dark skin.

"I know that difficulty, Miss Castillain," he answered, quietly.

"Do you? Then will you consent to teach me?" the girl asked, eagerly.

"I could not," he said, with a laugh which was not very genuine; "it would be a case of Bleys and Merlin. Please don't ask me."

And Marjorie, seeing how much in earnest he was, though knowing that that was not his reason, let it pass.

"I can, at any rate, spend on his child those savings which he is too proud to take," she thought.

"I shall slowly saunter back," said Marjorie, when the girls stood at the gate before they parted. "I've quarreled with Louisa, and can not with dignity address her for two hours at least. Lina"—the words kept back so long were on her lips at last, while a great tenderness shone in her beautiful eyes—"Lina, I am always dull, and—and foreboding like—in the dusk of a November day; are you? and I feel now as if, at any minute, I might be suddenly made to face some unexpected fear or sorrow. So I want to be sure that *you* would be my firm friend through all, and that I might, in all confidence, come to you for help and sympathy."

"Oh, Miss Castillain," began Lina; but some look in Marjorie's face, and some sweet new tone in her wooing voice, made Lina's words falter, and her eyes grow sad and wistful.

"And, Lina, before we separate will you promise—oh, promise, dear, as I have promised—that if any unexpected danger threatens *you*, you will come to me, just as I shall come to you; and let me help and sympathize with you—I will not say as a sister would, but as any one would who loved you *very* truly, *very* trustingly?"

The thanks faltered on Lina's lips, but she gave Marjorie her hand with a grateful, child-like confidence; and no uttered words could have made the compact a more sacred one than it was, sealed only with that silent hand-clasp.

All the thoughtful gravity vanished from Marjorie's face when suddenly, on her return across the fields, she met Sir Neil Athelston riding home alone, in his hunting-dress.

"Good sport, Neil?"

"Capital. Why wasn't your father with us to-day, Marjorie?"

"He didn't feel very brilliant," she answered, laughing. "He had a tiring day yesterday, as well as an adventure. He was shooting, and in one of the covers he left his hat and wig in a bramble. He hasn't yet quite got over it—the circumstance, I mean, not the bramble."

"He saved his head, I hope?" laughed Sir Neil.

"Oh yes," replied the girl, gravely. "Trust a Castillain to save something. I came to see the start this morning, as I promised, Neil, but I wouldn't go farther. I wouldn't drive, because Miss Chester wouldn't; and papa forbids me to ride, because I *must* follow the hounds when I have the chance."

"Why didn't you persuade her?" asked Neil, flushing as he spoke of Lina Chester, even so casually.

"I had no hope of succeeding," said Marjorie, gravely, "when I saw you turn back on purpose to persuade her—and fail."

"How did you know?" asked Neil, with a forced laugh.

"Oh, I knew, though the popular opinion was that you went back for your smelling-bottle."

"Hold hard, Marjorie. What an awfully sarcastic girl you are! I am not such a fop as that."

"No—oh no," assented the girl, readily; "popular opinion was, as usual, at fault."

"Have you had your bouquet for to-night, Marjorie?"

"No, I don't intend to carry one. It is conventional to carry a bouquet and fan. I hate conventionality."

"But you will carry the flowers I send you, Marjorie?" he asked, smiling.

"Of course," she said, with a quick change in her tone.

"That's right. I will take care that they are worth wearing. You are sure to look nice, Marjorie."

"And so are you, Neil," the girl said, with a comical glance into his blue eyes.

"I verily believe you think I care how I look."

"I don't think," she answered, with raised eyebrows; "I am sure."

"You always did give me chief credit for that sort of thing," he muttered, with an annoyed emphasis.

"Yes," she answered, slowly, "and for more. We are very old friends, Neil," she went on, with unexpected seriousness. "Let us think as little ill of each other as we possibly can, and—and *always* trust each other."

"Of course I always shall—I couldn't help it," said Neil, not understanding one half the generous earnestness of the girl, nor faintly guessing either what sort of a sorrow she feared for him, or what the offer of her trust and sympathy should mean.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BALL AT HIGH ATHELSTON.

LADY ATHELSTON had sent her maid to beg Miss Chester's attendance in her room as soon as she was dressed that night; and Fletcher stood at Lina's door, looking frigidly in upon the girl, as she delivered her message.

Margaret had been assisting Miss Chester; but Margaret had gone away now, and Lina was sitting alone at the fire, writing with just as much ease as if she had not been dressed for one of the state balls of High Athelston. "And not looking at all like it, either," thought Fletcher. "She's not much used to company, that's certain—as why should she be?—and what my lady wants with her down-stairs at all, I can't think."

"Yes, I am ready; I will come in a few minutes. You need not wait," said Lina, looking up from her desk, and speaking with that gentle dignity which belonged to her, and which so often baffled Sir Neil Athelston.

"Dear me!" muttered Fletcher, as she retraced her steps along the brilliantly lighted corridors, "to think that such as she can put on airs and graces to me, and yet that I don't return it to her in so many direct words! I did hear her beg my lady to let her stay in her own room to-night, and I can't think why on earth she shouldn't. It doesn't seem to me very proper for the companion to be just like the guests; it never is in any other family that I know. Why, dear me! I might just as well dress up and go myself; though as for dressing up," concluded Fletcher, with a haughty sniff, "it isn't much she's done to herself, after all; and it isn't very nice that she'll look among ladies—among ladies who know where laces and flowers and jewels ought to be worn."

Lina, all unconscious of this free and unflattering criticism, followed the maid to Lady Athelston's dressing-room, and stood, a little shyly and a little doubtfully, beside the chair where her ladyship sat patiently undergoing Fletcher's finishing touches among the laces on the thick light hair in which there was no trace of the silver either of age or thought.

"Well," she questioned, looking up into her companion's face with a smile, "have you reconciled yourself to the prospect of the crowd—or, rather, have you come to your senses?"

"I still wish—I still wish with all my heart that you would not bid me join your guests, my lady," said the girl, with a wistful earnestness in her voice.

"You silly child!" Lady Athelston answered, speaking almost tenderly, as it seemed (at times) most natural to do to the lonely, unselfish, gentle girl, whose influence over her was true and wise, and whose own noble qualities could not but rouse the dormant good of other natures, where the good might be dormant, and the soil but shallow. "You very silly child!" she repeated, laughing. "Sir Neil and Miss Castillain will want to hear you at my old harp again, and I shall want you to talk it all over with me to-morrow. I can not let you off, and I am sure you will enjoy it; girls always do enjoy a gay scene such as this will be; though, of course, *you* will not dance, unless for some special reason. You could not dance, you know, my dear, even if any one were polite enough to ask you, while any of the lady guests sat."

"And I do not care to dance," said Lina, in cold, quiet tones.

"Well, now," remarked Lady Athelston, not, of course, having heard that reply, "come round here; I want to see you, now that you are dressed. What nonsense is this?" she added, sharply, as Lina went up to the fire. "You don't call yourself dressed for a ball, do you? I don't like any thing so dowdy as that. Why do you wear a high dress? Turn round again."

Lina turned, a shy smile on her lips, and Lady Athelston scrutinized her keenly through her glittering eyeglass. But though for the moment vexed in her surprise, the displeasure could not rest in Lady Athelston's eyes as they took in the surpassing beauty of the girl at whom she gazed.

Over a long, untrimmed dress of white silk, low in the neck, and with small, short sleeves, she wore an upper skirt and high body of soft, transparent white, the exquisite whiteness of her neck and arms gleaming through it, unrelieved by gold or jewels of any kind, but the whiteness of the whole broken artistically by the tiny bouquet at her neck of crimson fuchsia and delicate fern.

"Nothing even in your hair!" cried Lady Athelston, gazing from the girl's anxious, beautiful face to the dark hair dressed high on the graceful head.

"You do not look pleased, Lady Athelston," she said, almost beseechingly. "I had better far not go into the reception-rooms."

"Rubbish, child!" echoed her ladyship, curtly. "I choose you shall come; and—and I don't think you look bad. I don't think you *could* look any thing but—any thing but well, wear what you may. But something in your face always puzzles me stupidly, some familiarity in the features. Pooh! I have so often said I will not think of it any more. It only makes me worry, and does no good, and it will turn out only some ridiculous fancy when I do find out of whom you remind me. Come."

"Sir Neil says," remarked Lina, with a strange anxiety in her eyes, and a tightening of her lips, "that my face reminds him of one of the pictures in the portrait-gallery here, but that he can never be quite sure which picture it is."

"A stupid fancy like my own, I suppose," returned Lady Athelston, rather sharply, as she gave one quick glance into the beautiful, grave face beside her. "Come along, child."

The ball-room at High Athelston (or, as the Old Athelstons called it, the Banqueting Hall) extended all down one wing, and looked to Lina a vast and brilliant vista of flowers and lights, as she and Lady Athelston lingered a minute at the door, on their way down to the drawing-rooms.

In the small gallery at one end, the musicians were taking their places, the leader receiving some directions from Sir Neil, who stood on the waxed floor, talking up to him. But the instant the young baronet caught sight of his mother

and her companion, he turned on his heel and joined them, his whole face lighting up.

Sir Neil Athelston was one of those well-made and high-bred men on whom any dress sits gracefully and well, and who, in modern full dress—a trying test—look always handsome, with a real grace and ease. Lina saw this, though she was hardly aware that the thought had shaped itself to her, yet the brightness which the gayety of the scene had brought to her eyes died completely and suddenly out of them when he came up to her side, throwing back his head a little, while his laughing blue eyes took in every item of her dress.

"How beautiful!" he exclaimed, involuntarily. "And yet is it a real sort of ball-dress? It is too white, and too plain—and yet, what *does* make you look so lovely?"

She moved away, to allow Sir Neil to offer his arm to his mother.

"You are resplendent, my lady," he said, merrily, as he gave it her. "Wait there one moment, Miss Chester, and I will come for you."

But Lina preferred to follow, and when Neil turned from the drawing-room door, there she was, close to him. Then, meeting her suddenly so, something in her appearance struck him. He started a little, his eyes intent.

"Is it the old puzzling likeness, Sir Neil?" she asked, lightly, as she moved to pass him.

But whatever it had been, he turned it nervously away now, and spoke of something else—taking a kind of refuge in the new complaint he had found against her.

"You have not my flowers, Miss Chester; and the few you wear you have gathered and arranged yourself, as I can see. Why do you always neglect what I myself choose and cut for you?"

"I like my own choice, thank you," she said, gravely. "I asked you not to trouble yourself."

"It is no trouble," said Sir Neil; "nothing is any trouble that I do for you; if you only would not scorn, as you do, all my attempts to please you, and—"

"And to make me look passable," added Lina, lightly.

"You know that *that* is not what I mean," said the baronet, rather angrily; "but stop, Miss Chester, let me give you your programme. How many dances will you give me?"

"I am not going to dance," she said. "I do not want a programme."

"Nonsense!" he cried, now really angry; "you must dance. No meddler in this house shall prevent that, while I am master here."

Lady Athelston had passed on now, up the brilliant rooms, and so was doubly out of hearing. Lina looked after her rather wistfully, but she could answer Sir Neil coolly too, and he could not detect the tone of satire in her voice.

"I think you have no need to remind us that you are master in the house, Sir Neil; but even in that capacity you can not make its inmates dance against their will."

"I must make *you*," he said, entreatingly. "If I dance with no one else in all the room, I will dance with you, Miss Chester."

"Please let me pass, Sir Neil. Lady Athelston will wonder where I am."

"Let her wonder!" ejaculated her son, impatiently. "I have something to say to you, which I must say now, for the words force themselves from me. Don't turn away. By Heaven, Lina, you think nothing of insulting a fellow in his own house!"

"I do not want to insult you," interrupted Lina, in quick pain. "I wish you never would speak to me so, Sir Neil. Why will you not remember that I am here only as a paid dependent of your mother's?"

Even Neil could see what difficulty the girl had in uttering these words, and that only a great fear could have wrung them from her; but, in his selfishness and infatuation, he had no pity.

"Lina," he whispered, taking one of her gloved hands in both of his, "don't say those words again; they hurt me—and, by all I love! they anger me beyond words. My mother doesn't care for your help—your patient, uncomplaining help. Any other girl—one who is not fit to hold a candle to you, even in your sleep—would suit her selfish will, would save her idle hands, as well as you are doing. She does not value you, and it makes me mad to see her placid acceptance of your service. She does not love you," he went on, a deep passion stirring his voice, "and I do—beyond any thing else on earth. Lina, come away with me."

The beautiful, innocent eyes, never flinching in their gaze, met his in simple, child-like surprise.

"Sir Neil, I am tired of this jest. Will you let me join my lady?"

"Don't call her 'my lady,'" he interrupted, pettishly; "you only do it to vex me. I hate to hear any thing servile from your lips, and you know it. Lina, my darling," he broke off again, his short-lived anger dwindling before his passionate admiration, "my beautiful little darling, I know they none of them think of you as I think of you, and they can never love you as I love you; there's no one in the world who could. Come away from them all. Let me take you where no cold looks can ever reach you and pain you. My darling, see how I am waiting to choose you before all the world."

The white face was hardly whiter than its wont; but a great fear and a terrible distress darkened the wide eyes which were still raised to his, and which never drooped as she answered, with brave quietness,

"It will be easy for me to forget these meaningless words of yours, Sir Neil. Before this ball is over, they will be for both of us as if they had never been uttered. Listen, your first guests have arrived."

These first guests were the Misses Castillain; and so soon they entered after Lina's words, that the quick eyes of Neil's betrothed caught the startled and defeated glance upon his face, and understood the very unusual constraint of his manner; but neither a smile nor a shade of pique showed him that she saw it. Before she had ceased her greeting to Lina, he had regained his easy composure—regained it entirely, though by a great effort—and was ready to pay attention to his first guests, just in his old vain, idle, yet pleasant way.

He offered Louisa Castillain his arm to lead her up the suite of rooms to Lady Athelston; and Marjorie, still lingering with Miss Chester, followed them with her eyes.

"Doesn't Louie look killing?" she asked, only to hide some graver thought.

Lina smiled, without answering. She was not thinking of Miss Castillain, in her flounced and flower-strewed dress, but of the younger sister, who leaned with careless grace upon a fauteuil near, looking so wonderfully bright and winning.

"Do you like my dress, Lina?" she asked, so suddenly that Lina started from her intent gaze.

"I was not thinking of the dress," she said, stammering.

"Of course not. I never guessed it. But I can not afford to mortgage my half-year's income and win no admiration in return. Please to admire me."

"I think, Miss Castillain," said Lina, shyly, "that I never know exactly what you wear, because—because what you wear is always so thoroughly a part of you. I could never imagine not liking a dress of yours, as I could never imagine not liking *you*."

"Thanks!" said Marjorie, with a laugh; "my spirits are rising. You don't know how they fell when Louisa told me that she never did admire my taste, and that the less I questioned her about it, the better."

"I think," said Lina, "that you look like an old picture. I mean the picture of a girl of fifty years ago."

"Old-fashioned, eh?" laughed Marjorie, rising, queen-like, in her rich and quaintly made dress and tunic of delicate pink silk and soft white lace; the bright brown hair, a wealth of beauty in itself, crowned by a tiny cap of lace, fine almost as a spider's web, which was, in design and fabric, the very essence of coquetry. "But do you know, Lina—either your words put it into my head, or the look of you—you remind me of a picture, too; and a picture in this very house? Don't be offended that I don't pay you the compliment you paid me, and imply that you look picturesque; for the picture you remind me of is—it can't be," mused the girl, checking herself; "and yet—Lina, you small, beautiful girl, can it be possible for you to remind me of a gentleman's portrait?"

"I don't know," laughed Lina, constrainedly; "I suppose such chance likenesses sometimes occur."

"Marjorie," said Sir Neil, joining them again—(and Marjorie Castillain noticed that, for all the excitement in his voice, it had a heaviness quite new to it)—"Marjorie, you, too, have neglected my flowers."

Marjorie detected the unconscious emphasis, and understood it.

"There was too much scarlet for my pink," she said, curtly.

"I'm very sorry; why did you not tell me what colors you wished? You have no flowers at all."

"No," she answered, with her bright, ready blush; "Colonel Stuart sent his bouquet to Louisa and me, conjointly; so of course I wouldn't touch it. I hate partnership with Louie!"

"You like things sent definitely to one of you?" questioned Neil, with rather a forced laugh; "and you don't care which?"

"I like them to be intended for Cæsar *or* Pompey," she said—"especially Pompey."

Then Neil took Marjorie, too, up to his mother; and Lina still lingered alone in the great outer drawing-room, not guessing that Marjorie's willingness to leave her behind was only kindness.

"How can you make that poor girl join in these things, Neil?" asked Louisa, speaking low, as he and Marjorie came up. "It must be a wretched ordeal for her. What can she understand of high society?"

"As much as is necessary."

"If she does come among your guests," Miss Castillain continued, biting her lips a little, but still speaking suavely, as she always did to Neil or his mother, "she ought to have proper feeling, and come dressed suitably. No old maid or dowager would look so dowdy and stiff in her dress."

"What, Neil?" his mother questioned, catching a little of this speech. "What are you all saying?"

"Louisa says," returned Sir Neil, with a twinkle in his eyes, "that your little companion is a model for dowagers; thinking, I suppose, that she comports herself like a duchess."

"The duchesses would not feel much flattered," said Louisa, with her harsh laugh, though she pretended to take it pleasantly in jest.

"I only know one duchess," said Marjorie, "and *she* doesn't comport herself at all. I pity Miss Chester if she is like that little awkward dumpling."

Neil glanced at her, and for the life of him he could not prevent his eyes thanking her; but Marjorie little heeded that. She had let him bring her away from Lina for Lina's own sake; but other guests were arriving now, and so she made her way among them (showering gay smiles and greetings as she went), back to the spot where Lina Chester lingered, looking on at the gay scene as one may remember to have looked at such things in a dream.

How kind and thoughtful Marjorie was to her all through that night! And, when Colonel Stuart came, he was so, too, in his grave, protecting way. With his ever-ready, ever-thoughtful courtesy, he gave her a place among the most honored of the guests, and such a place as Sir Neil's impetuous admiration and devotion could never have succeeded in establishing for her.

And yet what way will the protecting kindness of one or two simple, unsuspicious natures go, against the subtle poison of jealous and suspicious tongues? Even the whispered comments of Louisa Castillain alone could have destroyed Lina Chester's pleasure; but they alone were not left to do it. Eustace Jelfrey held a similar power in his hands, and used it mercilessly, too.

Perhaps Sir Neil Athelston held a greater power of hurting her even than these two. Though his opportunities of speaking to her were few (as he had a host's part to play), yet he could unconsciously interfere most of all with her enjoyment, by rousing the jealousy and spleen of those who were quick to resent the unconscious rivalry of the girl who, in her dependent position, stood so far below them, yet in her wondrous beauty so far above.

Lina was standing by the couch on which sat Lady Athelston. She had been called for some trifling reason; and then, with a careless selfishness, Lady Athelston had bidden her "stay there a little; I may want you."

And the girl stood there, pleased even at those

words. There was some one to whom she might possibly be of use.

The ball was at its height. The couples whirled past close to the sofa against which Lina stood; it was a gay and brilliant scene altogether, and the music gave her beautiful, dreamy thoughts. She would think of the pleasant part, and that only. Poor, lonely girl! Simple as the resolution was, no other more really brave, more purely unselfish, was made in all the radiant throng that night.

Only a few of the moving figures did Lina's eyes care to follow, and of these the chief was Marjorie Castillain, who jested randomly, and laughed brightly, and danced exquisitely, yet who seemed (to those grateful, watchful eyes) to be always fighting against some want which rose to her lips and eyes.

"How openly and daringly Marjorie Castillain flirts!" was a comment which had reached Lina's ears many times; and she knew that it was true, and yet not *all* the truth; though "all the truth" was not to be made clear yet, even to her.

But, rashly as Marjorie flung her witty words and infectious laughter around her, there was one in the room who received not even the smallest share. To Eustace Jelfrey she vouchsafed neither word nor glance.

Again and again had he entreated for a dance, but her negative was always prompt and cold and decisive; and her repeated refusals and cold neglect were rousing within him a very demon of spite and jealousy.

To one small revenge could Eustace Jelfrey look forward; and, in the anticipation of this, he smiled and danced and flattered still. And the night wore on, and Marjorie, in her brilliant excitement, grew more and more beautiful, with that irresistible and incomprehensible beauty of hers which no one ever could describe.

Colonel Stuart was lingering beside Lady Athelston's couch; the very duchess whom Marjorie had called a dumpling had been talking into the elevated trumpet, but she broke off on the colonel's approach; for there are some men before whom women's trivial gossip drops lifeless to the ground. Lady Athelston's eyes turned from the dancers, and met his with a pleased little smile in them.

"I am so glad to see you all enjoying yourselves," she said, "as I trust you are. Does not Neil make a matchless host, and is not Marjorie a queen among all the girls, Colonel Stuart? Don't you call her beautiful to-night?"

"Do you, Miss Chester?" he asked, with an amused smile.

"She is always beautiful to me, Colonel Stuart," Lina answered, simply.

"Why?"

"Her face is so intensely winning, and so true."

"But," he said, the smile still in his eyes, "it is never the same two minutes together. How can you judge?"

"It is not judgment exactly, Colonel Stuart," she answered, thoughtfully. "It must be something over which I have less control than my judgment."

"Perhaps so," he said, lightly, though the smile deepened to seriousness in his eyes. "Perhaps it is. Lady Helen Burton has just been giving me her opinion, too, and she summed it up in very few words, and those borrowed ones. She could only say — and very distressed she seemed about it—that 'her manners' have 'not that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere!' Do you think so?"

"I am sure they have not," laughed Lina, softly. "But, if I may borrow words to describe my idea of her, they will be Lord Townley's, in the old play, 'She is pleasant to live with.'"

Colonel Stuart laughed heartily.

"Your words are not half so imposing as Lady Helen's," he said. "And I'm afraid the title of the old play you quote is rather suggestive of Neil's future. Isn't it 'The Provoked Husband?'"

But now the old duchess rose and took his arm, and they went away together.

"What have you and Colonel Stuart been laughing about, Lina?" inquired Marjorie, when, a few minutes afterward, she escaped from the crowd.

"You, Miss Castillain. Shall I tell you what he says?" asked Lina, trying to look as if she were as happy as Marjorie seemed to be, only because she fancied Marjorie would like to think her so.

"I know," Miss Castillain answered, a look of strange weariness crossing her face just for an instant; "he said, what he has said before to-night, that he despises a flirt; he never even uses the less despicable French word. Lina, do you hate a flirt?"

"A real one? Yes," replied Lina, hesitating over the truthful word.

"A real one!" echoed Marjorie, with her bright, low laugh. "Oh! doesn't that show the narrowness of the English language? A flirt is a flirt, Lina; defined, a contemptible specimen of flighty, volatile womanhood. Oh! isn't English a small language?"

"I dislike the French word much more," said Lina, gravely.

"So do I," was the quick reply. "I hate all words that express it, if there are more than those two, which I hope there are not."

"And yet—"

"Yes—*and yet*," interrupted Marjorie, with a quick, gentle touch on Lina's arm, "that's all. Don't finish the sentence, my little grave and dear rebuker."

Just then Colonel Stuart returned to claim Marjorie for the approaching dance. She turned to meet his eyes, her own very demure.

"I have changed my mind," she said, naïvely. "You have been flirting," and, by the slight stress she laid upon the word, Lina guessed for what he had been rebuking her; "and it's not at all right, Colonel Stuart, because you know you are engaged to Lady Helen Burton."

Colonel Stuart laughed out frankly, but her eyes never lost their look of serious reproach.

"That is said on good authority," she went on, in cool explanation. "Indeed, I believe that good authority itself told it to Mr. Jelfrey, who told it to me. And so, being engaged, Colonel Stuart," she concluded, her merry lips set solemnly, "it is not honorable in you to behave as you do—especially to the dowagers."

"You have given me the right to speak to you now, Miss Marjorie," said the colonel, with a gentle gravity, which had no vestige of sternness

in it. "I may ask if it is right for you, being engaged, to behave as you do — except to the dowagers?"

The hot blood darted across the girl's face, and rash, proud words passed her lips, words which were no sooner uttered than they were repented of bitterly. But then they were uttered, and what availed the repentance?

"If—if I could only take his words as I take those of other people!" she thought, her heart beating fast in her self-anger and her pain. "If I only could, and did not rise up with every power I possess to vex and thwart him! It is always to do me good that he speaks. But, then —but, then, that's the very reason it's so hard to bear. What business has he to try to do me good? What difference will it make in *his* life whether I'm good or bad? And what right has he always to be the one to remind me of my duty toward Neil? I know I shall tell him some day that it is he who has made me hate Neil—by his very mention of him."

"Miss Marjorie"—Colonel Stuart's was the voice that broke in upon that passionate thought —"from such a speech I judge that the fulfillment of your promise to dance with me would be a drawback to your pleasure; so I will leave you free."

She bowed with a smile upon her lips, and he left her. Then Lina saw how hurt and pained she was.

"It is always the same," she said, impetuously, as Lina laid her gentle little hand on the restless fingers upon which Marjorie leaned at the end of the couch. "Don't look at me, dear; I feel a little idiotic—just as if some one had put me into a dark room to unravel a tangled skein of cobwebs. Don't laugh. What does it mean —you know—about seeing only 'a straight staff bent in a pool?'"

"That out of the pool, Miss Castillain, if we look—"

But Lina broke off here, for Eustace Jelfrey had joined them, and was earnestly begging Marjorie to dance with him.

"I *was* engaged for this dance," she answered, absently, "but am not now. I may as well dance it with you as with any one."

Her assent, almost unconscions though it was, astonished Lina, but it astonished Mr. Jelfrey still more. His eyes flashed exultingly as she took his arm; and Lina, watching his face as he proudly led her off, actually trembled to see how her smile could change him.

Colonel Stuart looked after them as they passed to their places, but he sought no partner himself for this dance, which had been Marjorie's promised one.

Sir Neil Athelston had been watching for his opportunity, and as soon as Lina was left, he sauntered to her; sauntered with as deliberate a step as if his heart-beats had been deliberate too.

"It is only those slow old Lancers next, Miss Chester," he said; "I will take no denial for that dance."

"I can not, Sir Neil," she answered, her eyes almost piteous as she tried to make her refusal easy and natural. "Other ladies will sit, and so I would rather not dance."

"Confound it!" he cried, in his hot impatience, "why must other ladies sitting a dance prevent your joining in it? Are you to be left out all the evening? Some ladies must sit out now and then, as there are fewer gentlemen than ladies here. Marjorie says there always are," he added, with his gay laugh, "and that nature ought to thin the ladies, as a gardener does his stocks. But I think nature thins them quite enough in another way. Come, Miss Chester."

But the gay, wooing tones and outstretched arm were equally unheeded by Lina.

"Mother," said Sir Neil, speaking into the trumpet, with a suppressed petulance, "if you don't insist on Miss Chester dancing the next dance—it's only the Lancers—I shall leave the party altogether. I will not witness the absurdity of her waiting upon you all night, and refusing every one who asks her, as if you were a tyrant."

A clever hit that of Sir Neil's—and it told.

Lady Athelston turned to Lina with an injured frown.

"Miss Chester, how can you be so silly as to hesitate when Sir Neil is good enough to offer to introduce you himself? Go at once, pray; I don't care to be thought a tyrant."

Neil's naturally sleepy eyes were full of laughing triumph when he felt the small gloved hand upon his arm at last.

"Now the room looks what it should look to me," he said, with a sigh of real relief and happiness. "Did you think I was going to deny myself all night? Do you think a man's patience can bear, for long, the isolation you have made me bear to-night, Lina?"

"They are forming for the Lancers, Sir Neil," she said, with quiet coldness. "Shall we take our places?"

"Here, please—a little farther on," he said, leading her to the set farthest from Lady Athelston's group, and nearest to the curtained door which led from the ball-room.

And when the dance was over, turning back again upon his arm, Lina found herself, before she was aware, out in the long and unfrequented gallery.

"I never had such a dance in my life," Sir Neil was saying. "It seemed to be over in less than half a minute. No wonder," he added, his voice sounding doubly low in the vaulted corridor—"it was my first dance with my first love."

"Why do we go this way, Sir Neil?" asked Lina, trying to draw her hand from his. "There is no other entrance to the ball-room. Let us turn."

"You always refuse to understand me, Lina," the young man interrupted, hastily; "you always treat me as if you thought I was making a mistake, or something equally ridiculous. Why won't you understand that I love you as I never loved any one before in my life?"

"Sir Neil," said Lina, very calmly (she had drawn away her hand now, and was standing against one of the long windows, the little white-robed figure looking more beautiful than she imagined, against the heavy crimson curtains)— "Sir Neil, why will you not understand what an insult your love is to me, and how hard it is for me patiently to bear an insult from you?"

"*I* insult you!" he interrupted.

"Yes, with a deeper and more cruel insult than you offered me the day you saw me first."

"How do you mean?" asked Neil, blind to every thought but how he loved her, and happy

only to stand there and gaze upon her beauty. "Tell me how I insult you, Lina, when I would rather anger every soul in there than you alone."

"I do not care to tell you what you know so well, Sir Neil," she answered, wearily. "If you were engaged to me" (calmly as she said it, her thoughts only following out one idea, the scarlet rushed to his face at the words), "would you dare to say to Miss Marjorie Castillain what you have said to me to-night? You know you would not insult her—I must use the word—as you have insulted me; you know that, as the case is reversed, you think no shame of insulting a dependent. What your treachery is to Miss Castillain, I can not bear to say."

"I can not help it," put in Neil, moodily. "I can no more prevent myself loving you than I can prevent your being beautiful. I never loved Marjorie; I know now that I never understood what love meant until I saw you. Oh, Lina! my first love, my only love, why should you be the one to turn away from me—you, the only one to whom I ever pleaded? Let us go away, my darling; wherever you like. The very slightest wish that you can form I will carry out. I have wealth, and power, and strength, and youth. Lina, could you not be happy with me? Oh! surely yes, when I love you with such devotion. Only just one word, my precious love; only whisper one word, and years of happiness can be ours—yours and mine, dear—happiness only like a dream."

"I shall go away from High Athelston, Sir Neil," said Lina, speaking low and almost with calmness, though her heart beat wildly in her fear, and the unusual color burned in a feverish spot on either cheek. "That is the only thing left for me to do."

"Go away!" he echoed, passionately. "If you do go—if you go without me—I shall follow you; ay, to the world's end, my precious one."

And then, in the madness of his love, he forgot her loneliness and her claim upon him, and caught her in his arms and kissed her, as a brave and honorable man would have died rather than kiss one woman while he was engaged to another.

A moment afterward he stood alone where she had left him, the blood dyeing his face as the sound of a distant step made him turn again hurriedly. Then, face to face, the two men met who were never to meet as friends after this night.

A few skillfully chosen and well-timed words from Eustace Jelfrey won the truth from Sir Neil; and a little advice, crafty as the man's nature, sent him back to the ball-room, hopeful again. Then the tutor passed down the gallery in his search for Lina, smiling as he went.

CHAPTER XX.

JELFREY'S LAST THREAT.

LOUISA CASTILLAIN held Lady Athelston in custody in a secluded recess in one of the drawing-rooms. Dancing was still going on in the Banqueting Hall, but since supper Louisa had been in attendance—generously supplying Miss Chester's place, as she gave Lady Athelston to understand—and had denied herself the society of her partners, just to spend an hour among those elders who had grown a little weary of the dancing, and had taken refuge here.

These two were in the midst of an energetic dialogue, which had been carried on in subdued tones ever since they had been settled in this snug retreat.

"But of course, if you find, when you receive the answer to this second letter, that what I suspect is really true," Miss Castillain remarked, "you will at once dismiss Miss Chester. You can hardly do otherwise, can you, dear Lady Athelston?"

"I—I suppose not," she replied, not overreadily. "I suppose it will be necessary."

"It would be bad, even for the girl herself, to retain her in your service under those circumstances," remarked Miss Castillain, charitably. "It would be bad even for the whole household. Think how every one in the county values your judgment, Lady Athelston, and then think how they would feel if they knew you had kept an impostor on as your companion. We can not, indeed, afford to lose our confidence in you," concluded Louisa, with a bewitching smile; "we can afford almost any thing better than that. And then think," she added, thoughtfully, "how bad it will be for Neil to have her in the house. There will surely be some unpleasantness. She will make mischief between him and Marjorie. Oh, of course you will judge it quite necessary to dismiss her at once!"

And Lady Athelston, acting entirely under Louisa's influence now, as she must always act under the influence of some one, promised to do what Miss Castillain thought right, and owned that what Louisa proposed *would* be exactly right; but still a qualm hovered over her.

"Neil is so odd," she said: "he may be angry."

"He *is* odd," assented Louisa, with no sign of having cunningly brought the conversation round to this point; "therefore I think the safest and wisest thing for you to do would be to dismiss Miss Chester quietly, when Neil is away."

"Yes, that would be better," said Lady Athelston, as if the very anticipation of his absence were a relief.

"Then that is all arranged?" questioned Miss Castillain, with no evidence of being pleased herself, "and I am sure it is wisely planned. But, dear Lady Athelston, do promise me that when the letter comes you will show it to me first; at any rate, that you will consult me before you send Miss Chester away."

"Of course," Lady Athelston answered, not at all pleased at the prospect contained in Louisa's last five words; "of course, my dear, as you and Mr. Jelfrey have done it all for me, I shall consult you. The letter is to come to him; and, from all accounts, my dear, he will be more anxious to tell *you* first. Is that true?"

"I am sure, dear Lady Athelston," replied Louisa, blushing and bridling, "he will never think of telling *that* even to me, until you are told."

"Well, well," remarked Lady Athelston, pleasantly, understanding the blushing and bridling, "he is a clever man, my dear, and handsome. Still you ought to have looked higher."

"But, you know," whispered Louisa, repeating credulously one of her supposed lover's deepest falsehoods, "he is only a tutor for a time, and by his own choice."

The tutor, who was a tutor for a time, and by his own choice, had in the mean time found Lina Chester in the blue morning-room, where she had sat alone on her first arrival at High Athelston.

"Miss Chester," he said, leaning with his back against the centre-table, and speaking with a coolness and ease which, to her, seemed the essence of insolence, "I am deputed by Sir Neil Athelston to bid you to return to the ball-room."

"You?" questioned Lina, with a quiet self-possession which showed no sign of fear. "A strange embassador even for him to choose."

"What on earth is the use of your avoiding Sir Neil as you do?" inquired Jelfrey, curiously studying the white figure and the pure face. "It offends you, I suppose, that he is said to be engaged to Miss Castillain. Rubbish!" sneered Jelfrey, excited by the thought. "He will never marry her. Why, I can make you sure of that by a word!"

"Never mind," interposed Lina, with haughty coldness.

"Marjorie Castillain," he said, in a whisper which could not hide the passion of his voice, "is too fond of some one else ever to marry Athelston; does that satisfy you?"

"I was not unsatisfied," remarked Lina, with quiet scorn. "What need have you to tell me this?"

"No need," returned Jelfrey, with a quick sneer; "I don't know why I took the trouble to tell you. I came for another purpose. Miss Chester, I have in my room a letter from the lady who lives at No. 18 Berkeley Square, an answer to one Lady Athelston wrote making inquiries about the young lady who purported to have lived there as governess, and whose very flattering testimonial came from that address. That letter I give to Lady Athelston to-morrow, unless—"

No cry had escaped the girl's white lips; no tears rose to the wide, startled eyes; but the pause which followed his words seemed like an hour of agony to her.

"The writer, Miss Chester," he continued, breaking that awful pause at last, "ignores all knowledge of the Mrs. M'Mullen whose name you gave to Lady Athelston, except that (just before last season) she left her house for a month in the charge of her dress-maker, whose name is M'Mullen, and who lived then in rooms in Conduit Street. She explains this politely. Considering that the letter sent to her house inquiring about a former governess could scarcely be intended for this dress-maker, she thought it best to answer it; for she opened it because the number was affixed; and she could not tell where to send it. When Lady Athelston has read this reply to her letter, she will, I am sure, either wish me to go to London to investigate this, or require you to leave here at once. Either of these things, though, can be prevented by your consenting to do exactly what I propose. Then, if there is any deception of which you fear discovery, you will escape it."

After his cold, calculating speech, Lina's passionate words fell like a cry.

"Why keep up this horrible veil between us even now?—now when you show yourself here to me alone in your own true colors? You know all that Lady Athelston will hear; all that you yourself could find out for her if you went on purpose."

"But what I know need not be told to any one," he said, avoiding unconsciously both the scorn and the fear which flashed from her beautiful eyes. "You know what I told you before, when—well, we need not recall that night. You know how you are to act toward Sir Neil; do you consent to that?"

"Never!" she answered, with slow distress.

"Then there is but one thing you can do," he said, deliberately; "you must go away—away from High Athelston entirely; and your—and that artist fellow in Nether Lane must go too; just as I said before. He must go promptly and quickly."

"I—can not," faltered Lina. "Have you no pity? Where can I go? Where can he go? What harm can he do you—or any one?"

"That must be done—or the letter shown," remarked Jelfrey, folding his arms complacently, and watching the quivering pain of the girl's face.

"I have always known you to be false and cruel," she said, slowly. "I—I would rather he went away—homeless and suspected, as he must be—than that he were false and cruel as you are false and cruel."

"Then he is to go? That's right," Jelfrey said, ironically. "I thought that you, with your peculiar notions, would not stay here under false pretenses, deceiving those who have kindly taken you in."

"Hush!" she cried. "There is no need for you to speak to me of this."

"Then what have you decided?" he asked. "I have no wish to stay here. I only wait to know how I am to act regarding that letter which I hold."

"Must I—must I decide to-night—alone—here—now?"

"I will not say that," he answered, with a gesture of easy concession. "You may think of it, if you like, until to-morrow—until to-morrow night. I will find means of receiving your answer. Leave all that to me. Only be prepared with it to-morrow night; and it must be decisive. It can not, surely, be difficult to choose between two definite plans; either being dismissed with all your antecedents known, or going away freely, still believed in as the old lady has believed in you all along."

"That will do," said Lina, raising her hand involuntarily to stop him. "You have said enough. I will tell you my decision to-morrow."

"Then I will wait," he smiled. "And now, good-night."

These parting words Lina passed by, perhaps not even hearing them; and then she left the pretty little room, which had suddenly grown hateful to her, and crept along the passages toward her own chamber, her face drooped in its unspeakable anguish.

Marjorie Castillain, in her search for Lina, came suddenly upon the small, white-clad figure, and read this unutterable anguish at a glance. Silently and tenderly she took the lonely girl to her warm and loving heart.

"My dear, my dear!" she whispered, and her eyes were wet once more with those big, rare tears of hers which did not fall, "never mind it all, whatever it is. May I come to your room when I can leave them below? Oh! I wish I

dare leave them now! I am so sick, so weary of it all!"

"Please, no—please, not to-night," said Lina, her lips twitching as she tried to speak without a sob. "Oh, I wish I could tell you! Oh, I should like to tell you—after—after to-morrow night!"

"Yes, dear," murmured Marjorie, soothingly, as she kissed the trembling lips again and again; "to-morrow night I shall come and fetch you to Hawkedale, or come and stay with you here, whichever you like, you poor little trembling child! Good-night—good-night."

Marjorie watched her walking on down the lighted corridor—so feebly and lingeringly—then turned and took her own way back to the ball-room, to be the gayest and prettiest figure in the gay and pretty scene.

"I ought not to wonder at any sorrow our engagement may bring (if that is it)," she whispered to herself, while she was still alone, and had no need to hide the sympathy upon her face. "I knew it from the beginning. The only truthful thing Neil did was to give me pearls in my betrothal-ring—pearls and tears, all one—and the only truthful thing I have done through these years has been to wear them."

CHAPTER XXI.

WAITING FOR THE DUSK.

It was the morning after the ball at High Athelston, and Fitz Spendir sat at work in so much of the faint, cold sunshine as could find its way into the little cottage in Nether Lane. He was copying the painting which Colonel Stuart had ordered for Mrs. Esdaile, and Jet was in the garden, raking the soil, and "making the place look neat and nice," as he said. Suddenly the child ran in delightedly.

"Oh, dad!" he cried, "Jack Esdaile's come on his pony to fetch me to go all through the valley to a farm-house on the other side of the hills, and we're to ride in turns. Oh, father, do let me go! And he's got lunch, and we're to be nearly all day."

Fitz was laughing at the excited, unconnected speech, when the bright little face of Jack Esdaile appeared at the door.

"Good-morning, Mr. Spendir," he said. "I can not come in because I have my pony here, and he will be spoiling Jet's borders if I leave him. Uncle Alick told me I was to stay here persuading you until you let Jet come with me. I have a holiday from now all day. I'm going to the Low Farm on an errand for mamma. Jet's quite well enough to come now; isn't he, Mr. Spendir? I won't let him get tired. He shall ride just all the way. Why, if I like, you know, I can ride behind him. You will let him come, Mr. Spendir?"

As if Fitz could have said "No," seeing the bright excitement of Jet's delicate face, and hearing the breathless whisper, "Let me go, dad!" As if he could have said "No," even if he had known what the end of that day was to be!

"Run in, laddie," he whispered, stooping with his hand on the child's shoulder, "run in for your jacket."

Jack Esdaile heard the whisper, and with quick tact he turned to his pony.

"If you please, Mr. Spendir, I'll lead him down the garden again, and wait at the gate for Jet. I want to alter the stirrup leathers, too."

"That boy has just the thoughtful delicacy of his uncle," thought Fitz, going into the house again; "what a friend for my lad to have found! Well," he added aloud, as Jet came down the narrow stairs, busily forcing his arms into the tight sleeves of his "best jacket," "well, are you all right now? Bring me the brush."

So first he brushed the child's clothes, slowly and carefully. Then he parted his straight hair afresh, and brushed it up until it looked almost curly, as Jet said. Then he buttoned on a clean collar, and tied his faded tie into a peculiar knot which concealed the soiled parts.

"Capital!" exclaimed the artist, standing back and viewing him. "You look first-rate, Jet; but—but have you no gloves?"

"Father," whispered the child, timidly, "I lost those you bought me for church; I—I couldn't help it."

"That's a pretty state of affairs, then!" said Fitz, screwing up his mouth for a whistle of despair. "I do believe I'd sooner have lost five shillings than heard that. What's to be done now?"

"Perhaps Jack hasn't any on," suggested the delinquent, hopefully.

"Famous idea!" cried the artist, in his genial good-humor. "Let's see—but, cautiously."

So he stepped to the window on tiptoe, and looked out to where the boy (still courteous and patient) stood beside his pony.

"No," whispered Fitz, with a pirouette back into the room, "I believe he has none. Then it doesn't matter about you, does it, Jet?"

"It never mattered about me, dad," returned the boy, in his quiet, old-fashioned way. "I never mind that sort of thing with Jack; he never laughs at me."

Fitz Spendir's eyes darkened a little at this speech. He knew that other children often laughed at his boy, and the thought was a hard one patiently to bear; though few could have told better than himself what the mocking of such lips was worth, and how slow the best and noblest are to pass their judgment on the little ones.

"Father," said Jet, catching this look upon the artist's face, "don't let me go. You'll be lonely, won't you, dad?"

"Not a bit," was the quick, laughing answer; "I shall be all right, and do a splendid day's work, as I shall not have you to hinder me. Mind you enjoy yourself as much as ever you can, for you don't often get a day's pleasure, laddie. Now, run along."

He followed down the garden-path, to watch the boys start.

"Don't be anxious about us, Mr. Spendir," said Jack, as he fixed Jet snugly on the saddle; "I'll take care of Jet; and I've got the lunch here, and we shall have something warm at the farm, and ride home through the valley before it's dark."

"I will meet you there," Fitz said, "and bring Jet home. You will not need to ride round here again, Jack."

"Oh, Mr. Spendir, are you sure you can spare the time?"

"Quite sure; for it will be in the dusk. The walk will be a treat to me. I have a short cut from here to the water-fall, you know, and the round of the road will lengthen your ride greatly."

They said "Good-bye" to each other, and parted; the boys laughing and chatting as they went on toward the town, and the artist thinking gratefully of Jack's uncle and mother as he went back to his solitary task.

Not long had he been at his easel before the cottage-door opened, and Lina Chester entered the room; a bright, glad smile upon her lips for him, whatever fear and pain were in her heart. But the story that she had come to tell must be told, and, though she delayed as long as she could, she told it at last. Told how (though she had stolen that letter, and Marjorie had rescued it, and he had burned it) a similar one had been sent afterward safely and securely; told how the answer to this letter had arrived, what that answer was, and all that Eustace Jelfrey had said to her when he told her that he had it in his possession.

And, as she spoke, Fitz Spendir, noting what sorrow and anxiety had done for the slight form before him, and looking on his own bare room, and cramped, impoverished life, saw two great wrongs far back in the buried years of which neither of them spoke; and all the strong and long-curbed passion of the man rose up in fierce rebellion against the laws of God as well as man. And Lina sat and trembled as she listened to the fierce, burning words, the truth of which she felt that moment almost as he felt it.

"The viper!" sneered Fitz, his lips tight upon his teeth, and his handsome eyes (which an hour before had looked so pitifully and so tenderly upon the child) flaming now in their hot, wrathful scorn. "The viper! When again and again I have known him to be listening and watching, why have I not slain him as I should have slain any other poisonous reptile? Do you call that Heaven's justice? Then let Heaven's justice go, and give me devilry—devilry like his, which prospers and wins its way!"

"But we don't see the end yet," said Lina, softly.

"There won't be long to wait now," he answered, as he walked angrily to and fro in the small room. "The end is hurrying, for I have lost the power at last of resisting what I have resisted so long."

"Of resisting," she said, piteously, appealing to him with both her hands outstretched, and her face full of deep, appealing love, "the sin which would make us his equals! O God, pity us, that we both die before that time!"

The anguish of her face, and the beseeching attitude, went straight to the man's heart, and stirred it with its old patient, brave forbearance.

"Dear," he whispered, the strong brown hands unclenched, and the fierce fire dying in his eyes, "do not look at me so. I was not master of myself just now—as I may not be master of myself when I meet him. But you have brought me to myself again. Sit down. You look so small and frail to-day, while my strength seems like that of half a dozen men. Did you sleep or rest at all last night?"

"How could I, when he had told me this?"

Then, in his great pity and affection, the artist took her close within his arms, and, on his breast, she sobbed until she was quiet in utter weariness. And now he was the comforter, gentle and patient in his strong and quiet courage, lifting a little this cloud which hung above them both.

"Lina, it will be best for every one that we should go; even though by doing so we must show our fear of him."

"Perhaps if *I* went," she said, "you need not. It would be cruel for you to go when you are busy here."

"And being cruel," he answered, in his fitful scorn, "of course it was his first condition. I think that is his chief wish—that I should disappear with all suspicion resting on me. But I never will go, and leave *you* here to bear all that, among them, they have made you bear."

"They can not harm me by that," she said, softly stroking the dark face with her hand, "not if the truth were not known; but it *will* be, it *is* to be, unless we both go."

"And if we go," he said, with rigid lips, "he will know that we go to avoid his threats, and to carry out his dastardly conditions. Now, too," he murmured, his brows drawn low over his restless eyes, "when I was getting on."

"Is it growing into a large sum?" she asked, with a wistful smile.

"Not very rapidly," he answered, with a short, hard laugh; "but still it is growing, and I am strong and able, and the years are long. Yet the sum is great to me. The master over there at High Athelston, with a stroke of his pen, could—"

"Hush! hush!" cried Lina, her eyes fixed upon his lips in breathless pain.

"Why?" he asked. "I was only thinking how *he* could never want a thousand pounds, and how little he valued it; and—how little he could imagine how long it takes to earn and save it."

"My efforts, too, are all foiled now," said Lina, sadly. "I was so glad to think that every year I should earn one hundred pounds, saving always eighty, and sometimes more. What will be the interest of that thousand pounds for—for these five years?"

"Never mind, dear," he cried, hastily, as he bent to kiss the piteous lips; "don't think of it ever again."

"Let us look our future in the face, just once quite steadily," she said, after a little pause. "If you go now, leaving your work half finished, what will Colonel Stuart think; after having always been so kind?"

"Always," Fitz assented, "always; and he will suspect me of the very worst and basest ingratitude of which a man is capable, as well as of countless former sins. Cheerful prospect! Go on."

"And Miss Marjorie Castillain has been kind, too—to both of us."

"Kind!" he echoed, a deep, sudden brightness in his eyes, "rather a rare sort of kindness, hers! Well, never mind; we can still just say, 'God bless her!' when the memory of her brings a thought that's almost like a prayer. I never hoped to be able to do more than that. I can do that as well when I am homeless, as I can now—as well even as if I were master over there, where she is to live. Don't talk about *her* any more. Go on."

"I think if we do go away," mused Lina, "that still the truth may be discovered; I mean, may be told."

"Would he lie so far as that?" exclaimed Fitz, with hasty passion.

"He may. I never can believe him now; and a clue like this, when once begun, is easily followed. What shall we do?"

"You may well ask," he said; "but who can answer? Need we decide now?"

"No, I have not to give the answer until night," she answered, clutching at the thought of even a slight reprieve. "Shall we think of it until evening? I will come here again this evening. I can most easily indeed, for Lady Athelston is spending the day at Burton Park. I shall have nothing to do. Let me come again, and hear what you have thought."

"But," said Fitz, with a sudden recollection, "I have promised to go down the valley at dusk, to meet the boys, and to bring Jet home."

"Is he with Jack Esdaile?" inquired Lina, hurriedly.

"Yes, they have ridden together to the Low Farm, and are coming home by the ravine."

"And you are to meet them?" she said. "Oh, I am so sorry, because Colonel Stuart asked Mr. Jelfrey to go up the valley at dusk, to walk home with Jack. I heard him say it last night at High Athelston, because he should be out this morning, he said, and might forget. Oh, I do so wish you would not go!"

"But I have promised," laughed Fitz, carelessly. "Besides, dear, why should that prevent me?" But, though he asked the question, he knew all that she meant.

"I shall come this afternoon," she whispered, "and, if you are gone, I shall follow you. I know the short way behind these houses to the water-fall. I—I wish you would not go until I have been here and spoken to you."

"I shall, most probably, be back before you come," he answered, cheerily. "I can think things over better and more clearly as I walk alone; the habit has grown upon me, and you know that it was always there. Are you really going now?"

She had risen and moved from the fire, where she had been sitting; but, instead of going to the door, she lingered, looking at that little colored sketch which had so strongly attracted her, on her first visit to the cottage.

The old church-porch, the broken sun-dial, and the one grave by itself in the church-yard path, with the simple name painted so plainly—all these riveted her eyes in a wide, sad gaze; and the artist (who had quietly come up behind her, and was looking on it too) put his arm softly about her, as if something in the picture, or its memories, drew those two together all the closer.

It was a silent embrace, telling much of a strong, protecting love on his side, and a clinging one on hers; and often and often she was glad to recall it.

"Shall we ever find the spot?" she mused, in a slow, wondering tone.

"I mean to find it," he answered, with the quiet, fixed determination of a strong, undaunted man.

And then she said,

"Good-bye. You will think what will be the best; think deeply, won't you—and prayerfully?"

"Yes, if I can," he answered, hesitating over the promise.

So she went; and he, left alone once more, sat down to his painting, as on any other day. At dinner-time he left his easel, and, walking up and down the room a little, wondered what it would be best to do.

Thoughts would not shape themselves properly, so, setting them aside, he brought out the bread-and-cheese and took his dinner. Then he went back to his work, and never paused until his watch-hand pointed to four, when he laid aside his palette and brushes, locked the cottage-door behind him, and walked, swiftly and firmly, as he always walked, over the fields toward the valley.

And so the hours had passed, and this had been to him as any ordinary day, so far as others could see; though Dorcas said afterward that she had noticed for the first time that no sound of whistling or singing came from the artist's room that day. But what did *that* tell of baffled hopes, or the shattering of a life-long ambition?

And Lina went back to High Athelston, wondering how she should spend the long, solitary hours. She knew Sir Neil was at home, and she knew why he staid at home; but she had avoided him so far, and knew how she could do so as she re-entered the house. Once safely in her own room, she would remain there until the dusk, when she would go back to the cottage.

Margaret had put a fire in her room; and, tired and sad, she sat down before it, and began to think. *Began* to think! Had she ceased thinking for one moment through many weary hours? How would Eustace Jelfrey manage to see her to-night? If they decided to leave Highshire, how long a time would he allow them before—? These thoughts, always the same, and bringing no answer, would never do. She drew her hand wearily across her forehead.

"I will leave it to him," she said; "he will see it more clearly than I can. I will do exactly what he says."

Then she sat silent, and tried to think of nothing; until, finding that impossible, she rose and went to a small box that stood beside her bed. From this she took a worn-looking brown book, and, with it in her hand, returned to sit beside the fire. There were no letters on the cover of the book, but on the first page was written,

"*Magdalen's Diary.*"

Lina's eyes were bright and restless as she turned the leaves. Then, finding her place almost in the middle of the book, she began to read. Twice Margaret came to the door to offer to help her, or to replenish the fire, or to bring refreshment; but each time she was gently and quietly denied admission. Sir Neil sent to summon Miss Chester to luncheon, but his message, too, was unheeded. Lying quite still in her low, white chair, she read on in silence, page after page; sometimes going back to re-read, and sometimes passing whole paragraphs unnoticed. Through all the long hours, while she waited for the dusk, she held the brown book in her lap; and followed, with wide, sad, dreamy eyes, the words which she herself had written there in the past years.

And this was what she read:

CHAPTER XXII.

MAGDALEN'S DIARY.

OUR last night at home—Gerard's and mine. We have been together to the Scilly Isles to-day, by way of keeping our twenty-first birthday; and in the beautiful abbey gardens we planned and promised for the life we are to lead together. What happy hours we spent in the loveliness and the solitude there! Will such ever come again?

Now that the autumn day is over, we linger with Aunt Jessie as long as we can, round the great fire in the front kitchen; hardly hearing a sound of the noisy gusts of wind that shake the old laburnums outside the wide window, and rattle their branches against the panes. Hardly a sound, because we are listening with all our ears and hearts to Aunt Jessie's low, subdued voice, as she tells us (for the first time to-night) the story of our lives—my twin brother Gerard's and mine. It is one of the rare nights that grandfather spends from home, so rare that I can only remember five or six of them through all my childhood and girlhood. I don't know what brings the talk round to the very question which Gerard and I have so often wondered over, and so often wanted to hear answered; I suppose we drift into it from talking of grandfather, and of our going away to-morrow from the old Cornish home.

Thinking it all over again now, alone in my room, I recall, as if I saw it still, Aunt Jessie's tired brown face, with the love and the gentleness creeping into her eyes, every now and then, as they meet Gerard's through the story of wrong which he is hearing for the first time, and which may well stir to its depths a warm, proud, generous heart like his. Not but what Aunt Jessie's eyes always do soften a little when they rest on Gerard, however cold and hard they may be to meet mine. But I will say no word to-night of her indifference to me—no, not a word on this last night. In the dim future, which I can not see, who can tell whether her love may not seem to me a vanished blessing? At any rate, I will think now only of her care for the orphan children, and her real, real love for one of them. And, oh! I hope that when the old farm knows us no more, her memory, even of me, may be tender; what her memory of Gerard will be, I know full well.

Aunt Jessie is not our aunt exactly, though we always call her so. She is grandfather's sister; so that she is, in reality, our great-aunt. But that does not make any difference. She has been all that we have ever known of aunt, grandmother—even mother. But, ah! not all that we *shall* know of mother. I think—and Gerard thinks, I know; for we often talk of it, we two, in the quiet summer twilights, and the long winter evenings—that some day beyond the Golden Gates we shall know her. Oh! we shall know her—Gerard and I—no fear but that we shall know our own mother!

The last night! There is something sad in the thought now that it has come upon us, though we have been looking forward to it for so long. I suppose there always will be something sad about every last time, however bright the other beginning that may lie beyond. It fills my eyes with tears even to write the words, though my life has not been a full or a happy life in the old farm here. But I said I would not write of that.

To-night I know a reason for grandfather's stern and cruel-seeming neglect of us; I know a reason for Aunt Jessie's love for Gerard and indifference to me; and many things are plainer to me.

I always thought that the reason she did not care to have me with her, either to help or keep her company, was that I never was clever in the farm-work, never quick to understand it, or strong to perform it; and I used to wish she had not sent me to the rectory, to study there, because it caused me to be still less fit for my post here. Then, she always liked household work, and I never could. Perhaps the feeling has been wrong; I have thought so, and struggled against it, but I have never been able to overcome it.

It has been much the same, too, with Gerard, only he is so different from me, that he would never shrink from any duty, however hard or uncongenial it might be to him—*never*. I know that never through the years to come shall I change this thought. I know that whatever paths lay before him, he would know instinctively, by reason of his clear, undeviating sense of honesty, in which his own straightforward course of duty lay, and that nothing would have power to turn him from it—no hardship, no hard work, no repulse. Oh, Gerard, my twin brother, how I wish I had your bright courage, and your trustful bravery, to help me, too, to walk uprightly in this new and untried path which lies before us!

We have always known that we were to leave Tresean when we were grown up, and could make a home for ourselves; so grandfather's decision at last did not take us at all by surprise. What will the home be like, I wonder, that we are to make for ourselves—the home in the far city? Gerard was in London last week, and has, in a sort of way, prepared for us. He has an engagement—a capital one, he calls it, though I can not help hoping he will study painting, of which he is so fond, as well as sing every night; and he has taken rooms for us in a house in Conduit Street; home-like in every way, as he describes them; but, then, I know how to allow for Gerard's pleasant exaggeration when he wishes to cheer me. And there, in the rooms in Conduit Street, I am to "keep house" (if that can be done in lodgings) for Gerard; and I might be wondering what it would be like, only that I know so well it must be a happy life for me, because it will be spent with him.

But, even while I am thinking of this, there is an under-current of thought resting on the pitiful story of our mother's short and saddened life, and I will write it just as Aunt Jessie told it us to-night. We had been talking, as I said before, of our parting, and of grandfather, and Gerard said, in his outspoken way, that grandfather's worst sin was letting his sister work for him as she did, without the reward of loving thanks or tender care.

"But I like it, dear," insisted Aunt Jessie; "I've always lived in the old farm, you know, and always worked in it because I liked the work, as well as because I had it to do—liked it better than any other that could have fallen to me, and much better than doing nothing. So,

Gerard, instead of being relieved, if it were taken from me, I should be lost for occupation, and miserable indeed, dear."

"But it will be heavier still when we are gone, auntie," I said.

"Yes," she answered, absently, her eyes fixed upon Gerard, not upon me; "you lessen it for me much. But never mind; I shall never work harder than my strength will bear, and if I miss your help, it will only make me think of you the more."

This was all said to Gerard, I knew, for she never said those things to me; but it was almost, if not quite, as pleasant for me to hear them said to him as it would have been to have heard them said to me. I knew, as I said before, that I never was much real help to her, though I tried very hard. I think if she had loved me, or encouraged me, I might have succeeded better; but when she dismissed me indifferently, as she often did, how could I help wandering about the farm with only my own solitary dreams (I mean, of course, when Gerard was away) to bear me company? And what wonder that, under all these, there lay always, as there lies to-night, a deep, deep craving for something which my life has never known? Do other girls feel this want, I wonder? Do other girls have to fight passively with this same almost indefinable craving for a something missing from their lives? And through these solitary hours of mine there is always, too, a dreadful shrinking in my heart—a shrinking from the untried future—which unnerves me terribly, and which I always dread Gerard seeing. Ah me! it is strong and cruel within me to-night; and even while I recall his bright, courageous anticipations, I can still only feel that fearful whispering in my own heart, that the future holds some vague, unusual sorrow for me and for Gerard. For Gerard! I could bear it so much more lightly if I did not feel that through our sorrow, however deep, however keen, we must be together to suffer (even though half the world should part us) as (in all happiness that we may ever know) we must be together to rejoice.

But what was I telling of? Our talk to-night. I will not wander off again with that old habit of mine; that is why I think it would be best to give up keeping a diary.

"But, Aunt Jessie," Gerard said, "you will need no reminder of us, I hope, as we shall never need a reminder of you; and the least that grandfather can do, after we are gone, is to make every thing lighter and pleasanter for you. Perhaps he will condescend to do so. Magdalen, I wonder how often he deigns to speak to you or to me during a year."

"Gerard, there is a little excuse for him," Aunt Jessie said; "and I am going, to-night, to tell you what that excuse is."

"I wish, some day," Gerard said, his eyes bright and proud, "I could have grandchildren of my own, if only to have the benefit of profiting by his example. Oh, what a different grandfather one can fancy! Aunt Jessie, I shall never be able to forget how he clouded and deadened every bright and sociable thought I had as a child. Isn't it a woful mistake to fancy that children don't feel the want of sympathy in their elders? But—but I don't suppose I ever shall have children or grandchildren of my own, yet if I *had* the training of a child, my own life would have given me a lesson, Aunt Jessie."

Silly to put down these words, but that they were a part of this last night's talk of ours—so earnest, so very earnest, in spite of all our efforts to be light-hearted.

And then it was that Aunt Jessie told us the story of our mother's life. And I remember it all so clearly and distinctly—as of course I should—that I can write it just as she told it to us, sitting so still beside the great wood fire, and laying now and then her small, hard hand upon my brother's as she quietly and shyly looked up into his handsome face, as if appealing for his patience and his forbearance to his grandfather.

"He was not always stern and moody as he is now, dear, though he always was—even from a boy—silent, and gloomy-tempered. I, who have lived with him all his life, ought to know him, oughtn't I? Yet I don't feel as if I did, even yet—nor as if I ever should. He married as pretty a girl as any in the county, though he was grave enough even then, when he was wooing her—taciturn, as I have so often heard him called. But he won her, and easily, too; for (as you can see now) he was a man in twenty for his face and figure. Like—a little, only a little like—you, Gerard; tall and strong and upright as you are; but it is his child's beauty that you really inherit, dear—his only child's. And she *was* very beautiful, at least in the eyes of all us who loved her. I don't think she was what is called really beautiful—not as"—Aunt Jessie glanced across at me here, for the first time, then was silent for a moment, checking the words that had risen to her lips—"but she was wonderfully pretty, and winning in every way. She had happy eyes, with coaxing laughter in them, and bright, funny words to say to all—just like Gerard; and no wonder, was it, that her mother's heart was wrapped in her, and that her father's pride in her grew with her growth? She had a way of running and singing about the house like a child, as glad and gay as if young brothers and sisters had been growing up with her here in the solitary farm, where hardly another young voice ever echoed, and hardly another young footstep ever trod.

"So, being what she was, was it any wonder that the farm felt like a prison—to the mother I often thought it must have felt like a terrible grave—after she was gone? Never mind how the news first came to us that she had left her home and us—that is not a night which I dare live over again, even after two-and-twenty years. We knew it, and you may fancy what darkness fell upon us all in one sudden moment, a darkness of vague fear, of unwhispered shame, as well as the despair of seeing our idol—and our faith, too, with it—shattered on the hearth which had been all our world.

"He had been in the neighborhood for some weeks, for the sake of the fishing; but he had been no more to us than other gentlemen who would come and stay at the village inn for a week or a month at a time in the fishing season. We all knew him by sight and name, but that was all. We knew nothing, until afterward, of how he haunted the farm after he had once seen your mother, and of how she met him day after day in the little wood beside the river, to hear him plead for a consent which had been given before we knew of this. It is no use my telling you of the parting kisses which she took from us that night, we all unconscious that they were so.

When you are able to think calmly of that time, all those things will seem plain to you.

"After that day her mother went about the farm as if she had been in a dream; a long, gloomy dream, from which now and then she woke with a start, only to fall back into it again when her husband's harsh words had ceased to rouse her. For he was harsh then, Gerard dear; and were there not reason and excuse for him?

"And so a little more than a year went on, and then we noticed a change in your grandmother. She would shake and flush at every sound, would start and give a little involuntary cry if her husband spoke suddenly to her; and she seemed to be forever listening for something apart from any sound in the house which we could hear. I noticed this change for some time before Hiram did, for he was just as slow then to observe the people about him as he is now, though never so hard and cold—I would have you know that of your grandfather, Gerard dear. But I could not win her to tell me why it was. From that night of May's flight—we shortened your mother's name to May, though we have never shortened yours, Magdalen—she seemed to shrink a little both from your grandfather and myself; but ten times more so after there came upon her this change I tell you of.

"One night—it was a late summer night, and the rain was falling and the wind was high—your grandfather came home unexpectedly. He had gone to a cattle-show at a distance, and had arranged to stay all night; and when he came, wet and tired, straight into the kitchen here, where I sat alone at my sewing, I knew in a moment, as plain as if somebody had told me, that there was some trouble behind him which I couldn't see yet.

"'Where's Mary?' he asked, so sharply that the answer would not at first come to my lips.

"'Out in the village,' I said, at last, speaking as naturally as I could. 'She said she was going to see the poor old woman at the toll-house.'

"'Down the river-lane won't lead her to the toll-house,' he said, very roughly. 'There's only the keeper's cottage through the wood, and there's nobody sick to go and see *there*.'

"And then he turned away, and went out again into the rain, in his best clothes and hat, just as he was. So frightened his words had made me—though I couldn't have told why—that I caught up a shawl and followed him. I didn't mind the rain either; I don't remember that I even felt it. I overtook him before he had reached the outer gate, but he didn't speak a word to me—not even to ask me what I wanted—as we walked on together.

"Well, we reached the keeper's cottage, and walked straight in without rapping. I never knew your grandfather to do such a thing before, but he did it without hesitation that night, I following him into the shelter and the fire-light, with my heart beating almost aloud. There, before the fire, on a low rocking-chair, sat your grandmother, and on her lap you lay, Gerard, wide-awake and laughing; while, in a cradle at her feet, Magdalen lay sleeping.

"Shall I ever forget what those first few minutes were like to all of us—to me in my surprise and fear, to Mary in her pitying love and her timidity, to Hiram in his awful anger? We can never, any of us, live through that hour again, thank God!

"Gerard, your mother lay there dying in the room beyond us, and her father would not see her. I need not tell you what he said. With cruel words still ringing from his lips, he went away at last, and I went with him—even in his wrath, it came most naturally to me to follow him—but when he was silent in his room, and all the house was still for the night, I stole back to the keeper's cottage; and the keeper's wife let me quietly in, that I might be with May when she died.

"Gerard, standing there and listening to her words that night, uttered, when she knew that the next she uttered would be before the Judgment-seat, I knew that Sir Gerard Athelston had married her on the morning after that long summer-night journey which they took together while we were searching for her, and crying for her here in the old farm. But how could she prove it, or how could we prove it, when she did not know where they had stopped, and so could tell neither the name of the church where they had been married, nor the name of the clergyman who had married them?

"Sleeping or waking, speaking in gleams of consciousness or in feverish ramblings, she always said the same things. And this was all. They had traveled all that night, fresh horses awaiting them constantly, and his servant taking the hired carriage back, she supposed, from the village where they stopped at last, and where every thing was prepared for their marriage; other servants waiting there with a private traveling-carriage. She never asked the name of the village; in her shyness and bewilderment, she never thought to do this; and months afterward, when Sir Gerard denied the marriage—telling her it was but a sham one to quiet her scruples, and to satisfy her that he had kept his promise to her—she had no proof to bring, as she could never have.

"Poor child! with what anxious, frightened eagerness she would describe all she remembered of the church, again and again; as if we, who had lived here all our lives, could know this village, which lay at the distance of a twelve hours' rapid drive! But still she never ceased reminding us how there was a deep old porch to the church-door, and a bent cross above it; and she told us how, as she came out of its shadow, she stepped upon a low stone grave which bore her own name, and two lines which struck her sadly and drearily then, but had often comforted her since, and which she could never forget. They were only these:

"'*This simple stone shall bear a simple line—*
Here lies a sinner saved by grace Divine.'

"And that was all she knew of the church, except that from the gate where they stood a few moments waiting for the carriage, Sir Gerard had turned back laughingly to read the time on an old grass-grown sun-dial near the church-yard wall. This was all she could remember, and this, as I said, she told again and again; breaking off sometimes to plead with Sir Gerard to make their marriage known, and sometimes to whisper to her babies, with a pity which it was sad to hear upon a mother's lips, but still always going back to the one subject, and always clear and exact in that.

"It was in the early morning that she died, and then her mother came up here, and pleaded with Hiram to have her brought home with her twin babies. But no; it was of no use. She was buried quietly from the keeper's cottage in the wood, with no name upon her grave—I will show it to you before you leave to-morrow—and, after that, your grandfather allowed that you should come here. Yet, from the day that Mary brought you here until she herself died, some long months afterward, he hardly spoke to her. Her care of you, or her reunion with her daughter, seemed to have put an impassable barrier between them, which neither could throw down; which, perhaps, only death itself could have removed, and so it may have been that death came in pity.

"Gerard, after she was dead, the love that had been buried in anger for so long awoke in all its strength. I heard him moaning over her, and calling to her piteously by all the old pet names; but they could not move her then, as they would have moved her if they had been uttered a few hours sooner.

"After that, we two lived on together here; and you grew up with us, brightening the old house for me, but never for him. The very sight of you always made him more cold and stern; the very sound of your voices deadened his voice, or roused it to harshness and impatience. So the time has gone on, and the year that he has always fixed for you to leave here has come. Gerard, you mustn't harbor ill-will against him, even if, at the last moment, he will not bid 'God bless you.'"

"I can never harbor ill-will against him, save for my mother's sake and Magdalen's," replied Gerard, in such a gentle voice that I knew where his thoughts were lingering. "Aunt Jessie, do you think he has ever tried to find that church?"

"I believe," she answered very low, "that he has been to seek it many times; but he never told me, and I never dared to ask. I'm sure," she added, as if appealing for him to his grandson, "that he longed to believe in his daughter's marriage, but could not. He is too proud to own this, yet I feel quite sure of it. And often I feel how hard it is to wonder at this—putting myself in his place. There was May's word; but, then, for a year he had lost the May who had been his truthful, innocent child; and to doubt *your mother's* truth was not what it would have been, a year before, to doubt the word of his own home-child. Can you understand this?"

"Aunt Jessie, *you* never doubted her truth?" asked Gerard, with proud impatience glancing through all his gentleness.

"Never, dear; but we women are different in our judgments. Then, as I was going to say, besides that, what dependence could he have on the honor of Sir Gerard Athelston? The honor of the Athelstons is held but of slack worth in their own county; and even *we* could hear all this when our child was gone. It is an unprincipled and dissolute race, Gerard, and your father was the worst of all his line."

"Aunt Jessie, is he living still?" I asked.

"No; he married again a week or two after your mother's death—whether he had waited for that, or whether he had not heard of it, I do not know—and died abroad while on his wedding tour. The next heir married his rich young widow. I have heard nothing more of them since then, and I wish to hear nothing more."

"I'm glad he is dead," said Gerard, sternly, "for I never should have thought it harm to harbor ill-will against *him*. What was he like?"

Perhaps it was because the question was so sudden that Aunt Jessie started, and her eyes fell by chance upon me, with an angry look in them, which, for the moment, reminded me of grandfather, as he, too, will look at me sometimes—only very, very rarely will he look at me at all.

"He was—like Magdalen," she said, hesitating over the words.

"No, auntie," put in Gerard, in his bright, quick way, "he never could have really been like Magdalen. No man's face could have been small and fair and exquisitely beautiful like hers."

I write these words because they were Gerard's.

"Yet she is very like him," Aunt Jessie said, quite coldly. "He, too, had pale and delicate features—high-bred, as people used to call them—and he had those grave, gray eyes, which look intensely dark, as Magdalen's do. But, however handsome or high-born the Athelstons are—and they are both, beyond all doubt—it is not a likeness to be proud of, as she knows."

Yes, I knew it then, and I wished with all my heart that I had had a face which should have reminded them of my mother, and not of my father, whom even Gerard, from to-night, must hate so deeply and so honestly.

"I wonder whether any Athelston will ever redeem the name?" he mused, only half aloud.

"I don't think it likely," Aunt Jessie said.

"But," I interrupted, quickly, "Gerard is an Athelston, auntie."

She smiled sadly as she looked into his face.

"Better be only Gerard Dymoke, as they baptized you, dear," she said. "No Athelston will ever acknowledge you as one of them; and—and, as I have said, it is not a name to be proud of."

"But I can raise it," Gerard said, so brightly and confidently that there came a stupid mist of tears between my eyes and his, as I listened. "Aunt Jessie," he added, after a pause, "I must find that village, and the church where our mother was married." And now the loving, ready confidence with which he spoke was good to hear. "Not that I wish it for myself—I have nothing to prove to myself or to Magdalen—but I must find it, for grandfather's sake. If we had not been going to London— But it's best so," he broke off, laying a gentle hand upon my shoulder; "we could not part even for that little time, could we, Lina?" (his old pet name for me). "No; it is far best so."

I knew it was. I know it now as I write in my old room for the last time, spending so the long, wakeful hours which would creep by more slowly still if I were to go to bed. To-morrow we start together out into the new world; and though I know that it may hold great disappointments and great sorrows for us both, yet I can echo Gerard's words, and say it is "Best so."

No. 7 Conduit Street.

We are quite settled in our town home now. Being with Gerard makes it really home to me; but at first it seemed very odd, after the old farm. On the floor above us, there lodge two people

who have interested me from the first; a mother and daughter. They are only "simple folk," as Aunt Jessie would say, for the daughter works for her livelihood as a dress-maker in the great houses round here, being wonderfully clever with her needle, and thinking it a great pleasure—the greatest pleasure that could be given her—to earn, for her helpless mother, all the comforts she could wish. Yet it seems to me—I don't know much about London yet—but it seems to me that I may be grateful to have found, in this vast crowd of human hearts and faces (all seeming so far away from each other, even as they jostle in the crush), two simple, loving natures who have already learned to like and trust me. They always say it is "good of me," or "kind of me," to go up to their quiet, busy room; but I think the goodness is *for* me, not *of* me; and I would not wish for a truer comforter than Rachel M'Mullen would be, if I were ever in distress, and had not Gerard. Of course, I mean if I had not Gerard. With him, what other comforter could I ever need?

He seems very fond of his life here, and enjoys his night engagements greatly. Sometimes he takes me with him, but not often, because he either has to leave me alone, or with the one friend who is oftenest with him, and whom I can not like.

I wonder why it is? I try with all my might to like him, because my brother does. I know he is gentlemanly, clever, agreeable, accomplished, and handsome; yet I can not like him. I suppose one has no power over that sort of feeling; at any rate, I have none in this case. I can not like Mr. Jelfrey, and I can not explain why. Of course Gerard only laughs at me, in his gay, pleasant way; but he takes care that I shall not be dependent on Mr. Jelfrey for my evening's amusement when he himself can not be with me.

Gerard's voice improves every day, and is making him quite famous. As he says, it is as good as a fortune to him; and I think, with Mr. Jelfrey, that the pathos of which it is capable is even of more worth to him than its rich quality. Sometimes Eustace Jelfrey says to him, laughingly, when he finds him singing here alone to me, that he ought to husband his resources, as they may desert him. But Gerald never heeds that advice.

"I'm too strong a man," he says, lightly, "to fear my voice failing from weakness, and too cool a man to fear any great emotion taking it from me. So don't let us think of a far hence to-morrow."

"Suppose your voice *were* to leave you, Dymocke," Mr. Jelfrey said, one day, with unaccountable curiosity, "what should you do?"

"Go into the dress-making with Lina," laughed Gerard. "What else could I do, man?"

"You can do something besides sing, surely?" he persisted. "What does he do all day, Miss Dymocke, when he isn't engaged at his profession, or rehearsing, or with me?"

And then I told him, I suppose for the first time, that what my brother was fondest of doing (after singing) was drawing; how, from a boy, he had delighted in it, though he had had no lessons, and was not supposed to have any real talent.

"Yes, I can attempt it," Gerard put in, dropping the conversation, "but that's all. Mine are but poor and lame attempts, Jelfrey, and, indeed, I haven't much time. My genius, old fellow, will leave the Thames unignited. Now I'm ready."

Then Gerard kissed me and went out. I wish he did not go out quite so often with Eustace Jelfrey; but I can not bear to say this to him. It seems as if I fretted at being left; and if he thought that, he would never go. I like him to go—but not with Mr. Jelfrey.

Last night, when they went out together, and I wouldn't go because Eustace Jelfrey went, I grew so lonely here by myself, and so moody, thinking that I ought to help Gerard in the maintenance of this home of ours, and the providing of that better and grander one which he delights to picture, that I determined to go up and sit for a while with Rachel and her mother. And I was soon cheerful again, there in the neat, bright room, with the patient mother who has been helpless for twenty years, and the brave, loving daughter who so gladly works for and waits upon her. I am able sometimes to help Rachel in her work; I was able then, and we sat and sewed together quite merrily. She praises me, and says my taste is worth much to her; but I know she only says it to make me believe that my going so often to them is no hinderance, as I often fear, but a help.

I suppose it was my speaking of her having no help in her work that put it into her head to tell me the sad little history of her adopted child. She had wanted to tell me for some time, she said; and I knew why afterward, when she came to Eustace Jelfrey's name.

Years ago, Rachel and her mother were staying for a month at the sea-side, for the mother's sake (whom the paralysis had just then left helpless); and while they were there a circus entered the town, and the procession rode in state past their door. A little performer, a beautiful fairy-like girl riding alone in the midst, won Rachel's admiration. She smiled at her, and the child smiled in return; and at that very moment the horse shied, and she fell.

Rachel did not quite understand how it was done; but in a few minutes the little girl lay on her bed, and the doctor had forbidden her to be moved. She won Rachel's heart entirely, and Rachel nursed her as willingly, if not so lovingly, as she was nursing her helpless mother. The child's recovery was very tedious, and the circus company were forced to leave the place without her. It was understood that she was to follow; but when she had recovered sufficiently to do so, she pleaded so hard for Rachel to keep her, that Rachel hadn't it in her heart to refuse, though she had many doubts that the girl would fret by-and-by, and chafe at the quiet of her life. But she cried that she never could; and so she staid with Rachel, and was, as she said, her adopted child.

She had been called in the circus, Rosette; but Rachel and her mother always called her Little Rose, even when she grew up. And Rachel says she was just like a little rose, and that they could never bear her to walk alone, even into the adjoining streets and squares where she would work. So Rachel nearly always went too, even though her time was valuable.

But one evening Rose happened to be leaving a house in Hanover Square, when Eustace Jel-

frey was leaving it too, and as it was raining, and she had no umbrella, and he had, he took her home, finding out on the way that she was going to the same place next morning. She laughed over the meeting as she told them of it that night; but Rachel could not. The tears were thick in her eyes when she told me how, from that night, he wooed their little Rose; how he married her; then let her come home to them just to bid them good-bye, on condition that she should then drop all connection with them.

And she had done so. Rachel has never seen her since, and that happened five years ago. She thinks she shall never see her again.

She sometimes meets Mr. Jelfrey, and asks about her; but he never deigns her a reply, only passes her with a bow. He does not know that Rachel lodges now above us. I wonder whether he would come here so often as he does, if he *did* know. I shall tell Gerard of this when I have a good opportunity; I'm sure he ought to know.

I wonder whether the poor, pretty child to whom Rachel was so kind had any living relations in the world. Rachel says she used to talk about a mother whom she dimly remembered, but she did not even know that mother's name, and all that she possessed which could possibly lead to identification was an old gilded locket, with a twist of hair on either side, and under one, which was evidently a woman's hair, was written "Dorcas," and under the other, a man's short curl, was written "Jessie." That was all, and how could that ever lead to the discovery of the girl's parentage?

Rachel's little story set me wondering. Is there any one now in the wide world, recalling longingly, and searching vainly for, the pretty child who was so grateful to those who rescued her from the life she could not bear? Is there any one who would grieve to think of her as Eustace Jelfrey's wife; and would rather feel that the bright-faced child they had lost was living even now that Life above, in which they can join her, than that she lives (a woman with a woman's cares) a life here in which none of those, even who love her best, can participate? Ah me! how terribly, terribly lonely must be the life of a neglected or an unloved wife; because, if she is true and brave, she herself shuts out all sympathy.

It was after Rachel had told me this that I took courage to ask her what I have been longing to ask for some time—whether, among those she worked for, she knows any one who wants a daily governess, and would be at all likely to engage me. She advised me to give up the idea, as I guessed she would; but I overruled all her objections, and then she could tell me that a lady in Upper Brook Street, to whose house she often goes to sew, is anxious, as she knows, to meet with some one who would go for a few hours every morning to read with her only daughter, who is too delicate for constant or hard study.

I was so glad to hear all this; and this morning I called on Mrs. Esdaile. Even without a testimonial she engaged me—I suppose she would have been more particular if I had been going to live in the house—and then, after it was all decided, I told Gerard; for I knew he would stop me if I let him know before. As it was, he seemed very much vexed at first; but he got to laugh over it at last, as I did; and we were discussing it quite merrily, when Mr. Jelfrey came in and took his own share in the talk, as usual.

He told us that Mr. Esdaile is one of the richest merchants in London; that my pupil, Clara, is his only daughter, and that his son is living in Valparaiso with his wife and one little boy, who will inherit immense wealth. He, too, asserted that it would not be right for me to go alone to and fro even this short distance; and Gerard gravely said that he should always take and fetch me.

So it ended all right, and in a few days I begin my new duties, and shall be very glad.

I told Gerard to-night of Rachel's adopted child, and he heard me very silently; man-like, he did not interrupt me even to give utterance to any wrathful words against Eustace Jelfrey. He says, in his warm, generous way, that he will find her out if she is alive; and I know he never says those things without meaning them. But how can he do this? I remind him of the many things he has given himself to find out and put right.

"I have my life before me," he says, laughing; "wait and see."

I have been for a whole term at my daily duties in Upper Brook Street, and to-day I have left off for a month's holiday. I like Clara Esdaile very much, and the teaching is not at all difficult to me; yet how glad I was to think of the holiday, and how proud I was to bring home to Gerard my first earnings! He did so laugh when I showed him Mr. Esdaile's check; and he told me to have it framed, for that it could not possibly be spent like an every-day sum of money.

"Besides," he said, "I shall be jealous, dear, if you spend it for any thing which my earnings can buy you."

So I laughed then, for this first check of mine has always been destined for a present to Gerard, who is generous to me, and who will not let me think that the money which I earn is for any thing but extra and totally unnecessary amusements.

While we were joking about this check, Mr. Jelfrey came in, unannounced as usual, and he joined in the merriment.

"It may be awkward for you if you wish to spend it at once and personally," he said, with thoughtfulness. "Shall I change it for you?"

I was glad, and accepted the offer at once, though Gerard still laughed, and said that such a valuable curiosity as that check never ought to be changed. So Mr. Jelfrey cashed it for me, and to-morrow morning I shall go to buy Gerard's present. As I came to bed, I went in and told Rachel of my check, and she looked sorry that I had let Eustace Jelfrey have it. I wonder why.

The holidays are over, and I begin work again to-morrow. I am not sorry to do so, though Gerard is strangely anxious—gravely anxious now, not laughingly so, as he was before—that I should give up teaching Clara any more. Gerard is more prosperous than he has been at all. He has an increase of engagements, and an increase

of fame; but I think the chief reason of his having more money, which still he always wishes to spend on me, is that he is seldom with Eustace Jelfrey now. Mr. Jelfrey comes here almost as he used to do, and is even gayer, I think, than he used to be; but somehow I can not help fancying that Gerard is much less gay.

Sometimes he is even moody and impatient with me—Gerard, who, all his life, had been so brightly happy; so dauntlessly happy through every cold repulse and disappointment of our old life. I never ask him whether he has any sorrow in which I can not share, partly because I dread the idea too much even to utter it, partly because I could not bear to see his face pale suddenly as I saw it pale a few days ago, when for a moment he misunderstood a question I asked him, and fancied it such a question as this. Perhaps in a few days' time he will be my own bright, loving Gerard once again.

Gerard was later than I had ever known him to be, and I sat wondering and wondering. I could not go up to Rachel, though I longed for the sound of some unharassed voice, and the sight of an unanxious face. I could not go, for I dreaded her seeing my own frightened face, and asking me questions which I could not answer. Oh, how I listened for Gerard's footstep on the pavement below! I felt—so keenly was I listening—that miles away I could have distinguished his steps upon the flags.

I was standing against the window behind the drawn blind, listening and listening with every power I possessed, when Rachel came quietly into the room. I do not remember her having done so before, and I am sure I looked surprised; though I was vexed afterward that I had done so. She came to ask me to go and sit with them, she said, but I could see that she had other words in her heart, though they would not rise to her lips—other thoughts, perhaps, which I can understand better now. I told her I could not go; though, when she asked me why, I had no words to explain.

"Mother is restless to-night, dear," she said, turning regretfully, "or I would stay here a little, for I'm tired of my own company upstairs. Somehow," she went on, nervously, so anxious that I should not think she had sought me out for my own sake, though I knew so well that she had, "mother doesn't care to talk, and the silence seems oppressive to me to-night."

But I could not go with her. So she kissed me and left me, with a few words of comfort, which were, I dare say, commonplace enough; yet of untold help to me just then.

And then the night wore on, hour after hour, until two o'clock had struck. I was not standing at the window then. I was sitting—oh, so tired—before the fire, which I kept burning cheerily all the while for Gerard. My head was buried in my hands, when suddenly a sound roused me. I started up, quivering in every limb, and waited for the sound again. It came, the tapping of some light substance against the window-panes.

I opened the dark curtains, and drew them close behind me to shut in the fire-light; then I raised the blind, opened the window softly, and looked down into the street. At a little distance, a man's figure was sauntering along the pavement. I stood there waiting breathlessly for him to turn again. There was no other figure in all the street, and so I knew that it was for him I waited, and the moments seemed like hours.

"No sound of coming footsteps yet; a long, long, quiet, horrible pause; and then—and then the same dark figure coming slowly back again: walking in the middle of the street, straight on, without looking up, until it stopped exactly opposite the window where I stood.

"Magdalen!"

The call was almost a whisper, but it pierced my ears like a cry of distress.

"Here—here I am, Gerard."

"Hush! Put your hands through and catch what I am going to throw, but don't speak."

I felt that my heart had ceased its beating. I felt that with one cry I must fall down, nerveless and powerless, at Gerard's feet; but his strange, awed whisper gave me a new strength, born of my terrible dread. I held my two hands through the window, and then, for the first time, he looked up—looked up with a long, steadfast, anxious gaze, which I could see, though his face was muffled and the lights were dim. Then he raised his right hand—in which I could see he held something dark—and took aim, slowly and deliberately. A true aim I knew that Gerard could always take, and my hands were ready. A light throw, quick and steady, and my brother's pocket-book was clasped securely in my trembling fingers.

"Shut down the window, quick!" he whispered.

And then he was gone. No explanation; no farewell; no words but those; and Gerard was gone, and all the world was blank and bare and dark to me. Yet, quite cautiously, I could shut the window, draw down the blind, and close the curtains again.

After I had passed back into the fire-light, I opened the pocket-book in tremulous haste, and found it contained only one packet—a packet of money in gold and silver—and on the paper in which the coins were wrapped some written lines, half of them blotted over. I knew the writing to be Gerard's, though it did not look like any which I had ever seen of his before; so I knelt down and read it eagerly and rapidly in the fire-light, my breath hardly stirring as I did so, and the paper shaking in my hand. This was all:

"Magdalen dearest, it will be best for you to leave here as quickly as you can. Can you go back to the farm, or can you—? Oh! how can I advise? I dare only leave it to your own guileless nature, and trust you to our God. I shall dare every thing to leave you this. I dare even the terrible chance of making you a forced witness against your brother. My darling, escape that if you can. In the hope that you have done so, I must live till Heaven grants me news of you. Nothing can save me, at the dock, Lina, if I once reach it. The forged check was offered by me. Will any jury hesitate? Only you, in all the world, will believe in my innocence. A month ago—"

But the remaining words were blotted out, and I could not stay even to try to decipher them. I seemed to know what they would be if I could see them; and did *I* need to be told of Gerard's innocence?

There were no farewell words and no signa-

ture; but what need of them for me? I hid the paper in my breast, close and secure; then I dressed, swiftly and silently, and for one moment crept into Rachel's room.

She was sleeping beside her mother, quiet and peaceful, and a wicked envy came over me as I gazed into her face. I left a light kiss on her cheek, and then raised my head slowly and stole from the room. I had caught sight of my own face once in the glass, and it had frightened me even more than the other sight that frightened me to-night. It was always white and small, and almost always anxious-looking; but now my eyes were wide and burning, and my face was weird in its pallor.

I think my footfall made no sound at all, as I stole down the stairs. The outer door had been left unbolted for Gerard, so I drew back the latch steadily and noiselessly, and left the house. The door was fast again behind me, and I was out in the sleeping street alone in the night and the solitude.

Oh, what a longing I had to find Gerard! Oh, how I prayed I might overtake him by chance! for I knew, by an incomprehensible instinct, that I must not seek him. Was he near me in the gloom? Was he near me in the great loneliness?

Praying breathlessly that I might find him; then breaking off to pray that I might *not* find him if it would be less safe for him; then, crying to myself, "What shall I do?" I went on. Shrinking into the deepest gloom that the streets held, and trembling so that often I had to stop to keep myself from falling, I went on to find a hiding-place; sobbing always, noiselessly and tearlessly, for Gerard.

CHAPTER XXIII.

END OF MAGDALEN'S DIARY.

At home at the old farm once more; but, oh, how different it is without Gerard! I used to think it gloomy always, but never guessed what it could be without my brother. Three days I have been here; three weary, interminable days. Can I have many more to bear, with this awful doubt and anxiety about Gerard?

Grandfather has not spoken to me since I came, and even Aunt Jessie avoids me; so I wander alone through the short wintry days, and sit alone in the dark in my own room through the long hours of the winter evenings, shrinking from the light in the rooms below, as I feel that I must shrink from the light for evermore.

Oh, if I could but hear of Gerard! If I could but know where he is, that I might just be with him in my thoughts! Sometimes I try to speak of him to Aunt Jessie, but she always turns the subject aside with a shudder. Still I know, through all, that she does not think her favorite guilty of this great crime.

I see by the papers that the police are searching for him. They came here on the very first morning, Aunt Jessie says, so surely they will not come again. Yet she seems as if she ever expected them. Oh, if I did but know that he was safe!—if I could only feel as sure that he is safe as I feel sure that he is innocent!

And so, hour after hour, I wander where he and I used to wander together. I have tried to go into the old outhouse in that dismal hollow near the cliffs, just because, when we were very little, we used to hide there from grandfather, when he was unusually stern. But it is kept locked now, and I dare not ask for the key, though I know there is no necessity for locking up the wretched old place.

Last night, in the clear moonlight, I strolled there—in my restlessness I am perpetually strolling somewhere—and, as I could not go in, I stood leaning against the door, looking at the sad, moonlit sea, and wondering (as I never ceased to wonder) where Gerard can be; wondering, too, whether I shall be summoned to tell all that I know of his flight, and whether he lets me know so little on purpose to make that horrible task a little less horrible for me.

As I stood there, in the wide moonlight silence, I fancied a sound reached me from the empty building behind; a sound like nothing so much as a woman's stifled sobbing. I spoke, and waited, and tried the door, and waited again, and called to ask if any help was wanted. But I felt all the time that the sound must have been in my imagination only, for the hush of the night was unbroken now, and the old barn silent as a vault.

I went back to the house, fearing that my constant dread and suspense were affecting my brain. Aunt Jessie must have gone to bed; but this morning I told her. It seems as if (though I can bear in silence my one all-absorbing sorrow) I can not bear these trifling doubts and uncertainties. Do others ever feel so, I wonder, when one great, overwhelming grief has swallowed up every joy or hope that they have ever known or dreamed of?

But I never expected Aunt Jessie to be so angry with me as she was, or to speak so scornfully and tremulously of my unhealthy fancies, sternly ordering me to keep silence on such subjects.

"Once throw suspicion on the house," she said, "and no servant will stop with us. It is a tumble-down, gloomy old place enough as it is, without your bringing ridiculous stories of ghosts to make the girls avoid it."

So I said no more to Aunt Jessie, and I have not been down to the old barn again.

I wish I might sleep to-night; but how can I? The moment I lie down, it seems as if the thoughts that had been coming singly through the day all start up to crowd round me at once, and grow gigantic, and burn into the darkness. And my eyes get wide and hot, and the lids ache and will not close, and my head tosses from side to side and feels like lead.

Ah, me! the night is worst of all!

Where is Gerard? Oh, Gerard, how my heart cries for you in its anguish!

And I wonder where is the false friend who committed the sin. I know he committed it, though I can not read those blotted lines which may tell me. But I know full well whose was the real sin.

Midnight, and the house so still! I never noticed until now how different is the stillness of a happy, guiltless house from one in which shame and sorrow brood. Once more I will try to rest.

It was of no use, I could not sleep, I repeated all the hymns I knew; I counted a thousand;

I tried to think of nothing; but, after it all, sleep was as far from my eyelids as if they had never known, and never again could know, its sweet relief. And so, before the first dim vestige of the dawn appeared, I was leaning from the window, watching for it with tired, hungering eyes.

Slowly there grew out of the silence the sound of wheels; slow, heavy wheels, in that part of the yard which I could see from my window—I mean which I could have seen if there had been light. At first I wondered a little, but then I remembered that I had last night heard grandfather tell Aunt Jessie to have a man and cart sent into the town, as soon as it was daylight, for tiles.

I had been so long unaccustomed to these old sounds, I thought with a sigh, that *that* was why I had begun so suddenly to wonder about these lagging wheels. But while I leaned there, still idly looking where the sound was, some one came into the yard with a lantern, and I saw by its light that this was Aunt Jessie.

Then my eyes grew eager indeed. Aunt Jessie there in the yard before daylight, with a lantern in her hand, and a black shawl muffled about her bent gray head! I watched with quickened breath, for I connected this at once—as I connected every thing beyond the regular routine of daily duties—with Gerard.

Ah! well might I connect this with him, for Aunt Jessie had only stood one minute beside the horse, when Gerard himself came up to her, from the gloomy hollow by the cliffs. I could not see him until he came within the light of her lantern, but I heard his step, and knew it. And then I watched—oh, with such feverish pain and excitement, and dread and jealousy! If he would but take me with him! If he had only thought it would be safe to take me with him, what could have stayed me from joining him now?

But I clenched my hands upon the window-sill, and quite silently watched him, knowing he was going away from me. Oh, if I could only have been Aunt Jessie for those few moments, to kiss his sad face, and to feel his arms about me! But—far away, cold, and alone—I could only watch him go.

He was disguised as a carter, and he wore an old servant's hat slouched down over his face; but, for all that, I knew him in an instant through the disguise, as I had known his step in the darkness.

I saw Aunt Jessie meet him with her hands stretched out, for she had put down the lantern on the edge of the empty cart, and I saw him kiss her just as he used to kiss her in the old days. With a quick throb at my heart, that was more like joy than any thing I had known for long days, I felt that Gerard could never have kissed her *so* if there had been the shadow of guilt between them.

Then I saw her take up his hands, bend her gray head over them in the light of the candle, which already burned low in the lantern socket, and then speak to him anxiously. I saw my brother stoop and rub the wet soil on his hands, with actually a smile upon his face, then take the whip, turn the horse by the rein, and leave the yard slowly. That was all I saw or heard; but I know how Gerard is making his escape. And, somehow it seems easier to me now to pray for his safety.

After our early breakfast this morning, I heard Aunt Jessie tell the wagoner to go to Penzance and bring the cart back with the tiles.

"Your master sent it in early," she said, "and you'll find it where you always stop. Go in at once; and you need not say any thing about it afterward."

She little guessed how I understood this order. She watched him out of sight, her eyes keen and eager, then she drew a long breath of relief, and re-entered the house. And all my heart went out to meet her, in gratitude for her love of Gerard.

Later on in the morning, grandfather was called out—he is growing more and more infirm, and sits for hours together now in his arm-chair—to speak to two men who had come about a horse he had to sell. He went to the stable with them, and on round the farm, they evidently tempting him to take them on. Aunt Jessie and I, standing at the wide window, watched them. She had a startled fear upon her face, and, for the first time I ever could remember such a thing, she clung to me as if I were a little comfort to her.

"Are you afraid, Aunt Jessie," I whispered, "are you afraid that they are here to search for *him?*"

"Hush!" she cried, in quick fear. "They are come to see the young horse."

But I knew why her hold upon my arm grew tighter. Yes, they were detectives, and they had all the buildings opened and examined before they left the farm. Oh, if they had only come yesterday, how terrible it would have been! Strange that I forgot to hide from them myself, until it was too late. I think the sound of grandfather's raised, fierce tones took all sense and power from me.

"Come *here* to search for the forger!" he cried, raising his stick in the short-lived, savage strength which his wrath gave him. "Do you think I harbor criminals *here?* He would be too cunning to come to me, for he knows I'd be the first to give him up—the very first, the very first! Come here!" he reiterated, shrilly, "not he, the thief!—he knows me too well. I should give him up to you with my own hand; I should strike him myself, old and feeble as I am. I would never have had the law changed; I would have hanged every forger under heaven! Come *here?* He daren't!"

And then he turned to me, and spoke to me just such savage words as he had spoken of Gerard. Of course the men then knew who I was; and so I am to go and tell in public all I know of Gerard.

All I know! Will it be crime in me to hold back any of the truth? Have I, as grandfather said to me to-night—and they were the first words he had uttered to me since my return—been helping him in crime? I shall never come back here after I have been to tell of Gerard. It would not do for me to come; even Aunt Jessie said so; and, if she had not, how could I have lived upon his bounty after those cruel words he said of me and Gerard to-day before them all?

I answered all the questions they put to me, no more, no less; but it seemed as if nothing could serve Gerard's cause. He had in his possession the check which Eustace Jelfrey had changed for me; having bought it back, poor Gerard! to

keep for my sake; and he had, a week afterward, cashed that other check for one thousand pounds. One thousand pounds! As if Gerard ever could have had such a sum, and I not know!

I told of Eustace Jelfrey, and appealed to have him examined. But he came from the preliminary inquiry unsuspected—a man exonerated from all shadow of crime. He had been a friend of Gerard Dymocke's, he said, and had once changed a check for his sister, but that check had been bought back from him by Dymocke, the very first time they were alone together afterward. About the other check he knew nothing at all, but, during the three weeks that followed the date when it had been cashed, he had noticed that Gerard Dymocke was unusually well supplied with money, and that he was unusually excited, with moody fits of depression alternating with this excitement, as his sister could testify. I suppose I could testify it, at least they seemed to take for granted that I had done so.

And thus, by some means, Eustace Jelfrey left the examination an unblamed man, and I a criminal in my own miserable thoughts, as Gerard was a criminal in the thoughts of all those who had been about me. I wonder whether, if we had had one single friend in all the city who would and could have exerted himself on our behalf, things would have been left to look just as they did look?

I am with Rachel now in the old room which is so painfully familiar to me—with Rachel only, for a few days ago she woke one morning to find her mother lying dead beside her. The shock to Rachel has left her quite deaf, though still just her own patient, tender self. She would not let me tell her of my sorrows, but she told me of hers as only those can tell of sorrow who know the joys that lie beyond; and as I listened, I grew a little braver and a little more patient.

All the hope is over now. Gerard, in spite of his disguise and occupation, has been taken. The words look like other words when they are written; yet to think what they mean! Some men in Penzance, who wondered about him during the few minutes he stopped with the cart, suspected and betrayed him, sending the police on his track—my poor, solitary, hunted brother! But I have lived through that time, and I can not dare to recall it yet.

Mr. Esdaile's son, who has come home from America in consequence of his father's sudden death, prosecuted with a vigor which every one called just, but which I called merciless and cruel. Again both Eustace Jelfrey and I were examined; but, after it all, there was the verdict uttered, for which the way had been prepared.

Gerard had changed the forged check; Gerard had had possession of the first, of which the forged one had been an exact copy, except that it had been made payable to Mr. Dymocke's order, instead of Miss Dymocke's; and Gerard had been caught attempting to make his escape in disguise. Gerard could deny nothing of this, and we could pay for no one to plead for him; so the trial was soon over, and he was sentenced to transportation for eight years.

Ah, how soon the words are written that mean an endless parting, an everlasting disgrace; a blight upon our lives which nothing can ever wipe away! If we meet again, we shall be old and worn and heart-sick. But I am not old and worn and heart-sick even to-night, while my life lies blank before me, with the terrible blankness of a storm-tossed sea?

I try to think of Gerard as he was at the farm, with the careless independence on his face, and always the coaxing gentleness in his eyes. I try to think of him as he was in London with me, when his gay, tender care and love made the life so pleasant for me. I try to fancy that I hear his voice as he sings to a thousand breathless listeners, with just the quiet ease with which he sings to me alone. I try to fancy that I see him at his easel, whistling softly as he works, and breaking off now and then to show me what he does, or to cheer me with a merry jest. But I can not think of him so. I can only picture him as he sat in the cell at Newgate. And my hard, dry eyes—to which the tears, I think, can never come again—must see him always so.

Ever since—since I came to London, I have been trying to meet with an engagement; for I must earn a home of my own now; and what am I fit to do but teach? Perhaps the unnecessary education which was given me by our rector's wish will be of service to me now. If not, what is there left for me to do?

Rachel wants me to stay with her, but how could I let her work for me? True, I might help her, but my help would not be worth what she would give me. We have talked over all my plans together, she and I, and I have decided to spend the money Gerard gave me on that last dreadful night in seeking an engagement in which I may be able to earn enough to allow me to put something away toward—toward that sum which I feel that we owe to Mr. Esdaile. No matter where the money went, one thing I must always feel, that Gerard and I owe that sum to Clara's brother. One thousand pounds! How can such a sum ever be repaid? Yet that thought can not prevent the duty still being ours to save it.

Clara is married now, and has gone to live at a distance. Poor child! was it a blow to her to find that her father died insolvent? But I don't think she would grieve at that, in the greater loss of both her parents within a year of each other; and I dare say her husband now loves her tenderly, and will make up for all. He is the brother of her brother's wife, and I remember how lovingly she used to speak of "Adelaide."

Well, our paths—which ran together for a little time—are wide apart now, and may never cross again. Clara was always loving and kind to me, and, even through this miserable time, has tried to comfort and to cheer me. Can I remember her all my life save with deep gratitude? She gave me a letter when she saw me last, which, she gently said, might be of service to me if I wished to teach again! That is just Clara's delicate way of speaking. I know it will be of every use to me. At least I know that without such a letter I might try in vain to win what I want. To-morrow I hope to begin in earnest.

I wonder whether many governesses have as hard work in seeking an engagement as I have had? I hope not, for the teaching is hard enough when it comes, without having these humiliations and difficulties in obtaining it. I can not tell them all, and, indeed, I would not

like to do so if I could; but I must tell about to-day, because it is to be the last day.

It began with as dreary a disappointment as need be. When I first began to try for an engagement, I sent my name, and a fee of five shillings, to a governess-agency office; and as they said they had the names of many ladies "on their books," I expected to receive quite a choice of addresses. But I waited in vain. Except one mistress of a small school, who wished for an assistant teacher, at a salary of fifteen pounds a year, I heard of none of the ladies whose names were "on the books." So I gave that idea up in despair, and put an advertisement in the *Times*. I wonder whether any author's opening chapters ever cost him more thought than the wording of that advertisement cost me?

For three or four days no answer came, but to-day I have had two. We would not open them until breakfast was over, Rachel and I, but put them in the middle of the table, and feasted our eyes upon them. Then afterward, sitting close to Rachel, where she could read over me, as she could not hear me, I took the first and opened it.

No need to read it, either I or Rachel. It was only a printed circular from the very agency to which I had applied, offering the advertiser any engagement she might desire (having many of all kinds "on their books"), in return for a fee of five shillings. I crushed that up and burned it, trying to laugh into Rachel's sympathizing eyes, and took up the other letter.

This was just such a one, to all appearance, as I had been longing for, and my hands shook as they opened it.

Yes, it was a lady's letter, but what a different one from what I had expected when I began to read! It was from a girl like myself, who had long been trying to obtain teaching, and who had failed again and again, as I had failed. She had spent all she had, she told me with pitiful candor, in advertising, and entering the agency offices, and going about from place to place to hold interviews. And now she wrote to ask me whether, if I had any answers to my advertisement of which I did not care to make use, I would kindly give them to her.

Oh, how sad it was! Yet Rachel laughed. She said she could not help it, thinking of the answers which I *had* had; but certainly it was not a very merry laugh.

Those were my two letters, and I prepared to go out with a heavy disappointment at my heart. I had seen the advertisement of a lady in Holloway, and I went there with hope more dead within me than it had ever been before. The house was the private residence of a Jew jeweler, and every thing about the place was shine and glitter, as if he liked to see his stock about him here, as well as in the City.

A sleepy, indolent lady sat and questioned me, evidently going through a ready-prepared catechism; but the brisk little master of the house had blurted out his one all-important question almost before I was seated. What salary did I expect? After I had told him, he interrupted his wife's catechism again and again to ask me to "lower my figure." He did not mean that my five feet were too many for his great house, but that my forty pounds' demand was too much for his large purse.

I did lower it, so weary was I of trying and failing. Then they asked me to play. I played one of Beethoven's sonatas, wondering to myself, as I did so, whether it would not have been wiser to play a galop, fast and floridly.

"Pretty well," said the lady of the house, languidly, as I rose; "but I prefer something classical."

I could not venture to answer, and so stupidly had my thoughts wandered to the music, that I was but dimly aware of all she was enforcing upon me.

I could understand that she was willing to engage me to instruct her "young ladies," and that she expected me to undertake every thing, ranging from thorough bass, efficiently ("a part of every lady's education now," she said), to fashionable fancy-work, three languages, painting, and dancing included.

I was dimly aware that I promised to do all this, and that the little father of the "young ladies" made another appeal to me then to "lower my figure," but that his wife whispered to him that I was "very low," and he had better let it rest. Truly I did feel very low then, in this glitter which was not gold.

And so I was engaged; and I begin my duties next week. Mrs. Raphael kept Clara Esdaile's letter. Perhaps that is usual, but I did so hope she would give it back to me, as I could see that it satisfied her entirely. I had not read it myself, for I knew it was not for my eyes that Clara had written it.

Four whole years it is since last I sat writing in this room of Rachel's. Four years of hard, dull work, of unacknowledged service; four years of real heart-loneliness. Well, it is over now, and I have other work, and another home once more to seek; feeling so tired, even before I begin. But I must not mind; it has to be done, and perhaps this will be the last time. There can surely never be another such a cruel ending as there has been to this four years' task of mine.

I never shall know how they found out all about Gerard and myself. I never shall know any thing distinctly about it, except how their reproaches and their scoffings stabbed me. If they would only have sent me away quietly, I should not have minded, for I have been teaching myself always to be prepared for that; but, oh! it was hard to bear the scorn and derision of —such as those.

Mrs. Raphael wrote at once to Clara's husband—Clara died three years ago—telling him that his dead wife had been deceitful and untrue; saying just what such women *do* say when they let their malice go uncurbed. Was not that an unnecessary insult, to him as well as to me? But I will not write another word about them.

I am here now, with my life to begin again, and the one letter, which was my only help before, is mine no more. Mrs. Raphael tore it to atoms, and burned it in her anger, sneering because a cry escaped me as it blazed. Hard as I tried to suppress that cry, it started from my lips in spite of me.

I can only search the papers now, in the hope that I may one day see some engagement at a distance for which I may apply; and how closely I search them, sitting here alone!

Rachel is living for this month at a house in Berkeley Square. The family being out of town, and the woman who has before been left in charge having proved dishonest, they have asked Rachel to stay there until the season begins.

I go to her every day, and we sit together sewing through the evening, but I am alone here at the old rooms until then. She never comes to me; she says the walk, short as it is, does me good, and she is sure to be right. So I go, and she brings me back, and we walk as slowly as we can, and cheer each other, and notice how the evenings are lengthening.

And so that day is over, and to-morrow the papers come, and it begins all over again.

What a strange thing it is to be expecting one certain letter on which all one's future hangs! My future, indeed—my long, long future—seems to hang upon the answer which will come from Highshire, and which may come now by any post. Is it any wonder that I watch for the hour so eagerly? And yet, looking back upon my deceit, is it any wonder that I watch for it with pain?

This is how it was. I saw the advertisement, and in a moment my heart began to beat with a quick, wild hope. One hundred pounds a year, simply to be companion to a lady.

I felt a strange, incomprehensible reliance on my own power, and I answered it at once; I could not bear the delay of an hour, though I knew I should keep the letter open to take to Rachel. I did not write much—I almost think my heart was too full—but an answer came back to me, expressing satisfaction with all I had said, and asking for my reference.

Then I knew I had written to Lady Athelston, and my heart failed me. Could I go to live so in my father's house?

All that day I kept the letter hidden in my breast, and had not courage to show it to Rachel. But it was all told afterward, and then Rachel made her plan. I was to write to Lady Athelston, referring her to "Mrs. M'Mullen, No. 18 Berkeley Square." This address would sound well; the letter would reach Rachel straightforwardly, and she would answer it.

She did—writing as pretty and lady-like a letter as any inhabitant of the Square could do—and for the answer to that letter I am waiting now. I can not work, or eat, or sleep.

Is it right to have accepted a situation with Lady Athelston? She was Sir Gerard's widow, married to him for just one month; and her son now—not his son, though, oh no, not his—is the baronet of High Athelston. I have never written the names before to-day, since that night, nearly five years ago, when Aunt Jessie told us our mother's story.

Suppose—but why think of these things now? It can not be wrong for me to go. No, it can not be wrong for me to go.

I felt that I would gratefully accept any thing that brought me money which I could save; then, how could I resist the temptation of that offer of one hundred pounds a year? Through all the very most hopeful time of my trying, I never fancied I could earn that. Eighty pounds a year I shall be able to put away toward paying that terrible debt of Gerard's and mine. Four years are gone—half the time of his absence; and through those years I have been able to save so little.

How long they have seemed! Yet now that they are over, here I am, waiting for my fate in Rachel's quiet room, just as I was waiting then.

And how have those four years passed with others? With Rachel, evenly, busily, and patiently; of that I am sure, though through all that time she has never, for one hour, ceased to miss her mother, and to hope—against hope—that she should see her adopted child again. She never has done so; nor has she seen Eustace Jelfrey since Gerard's trial.

At the old farm grandfather lives on alone. When—only by chance—I heard of Aunt Jessie's death, I wrote to ask him if he would see me. Twice I wrote, for I fancied my first letter might not have reached him; but I never had an answer. I wish he had written to me, even if only to tell me that he would not see me.

I don't know what put it into my head this evening to show Rachel that little note Gerard threw into my hands on the night he went away. I think I must have taken it to her just because I was so tired of talking of that other letter which we are expecting; or perhaps only because my thoughts were so full of Gerard. Now I am very, very glad I took it; for, between us, we have managed to read most of the blotted words. It took hours to do it; but I think we have read them rightly now. This is what we make them out to be:

"A month ago he told me a specious lie. He told me that Mr. Esdaile was lending him a sum of money just for a few weeks, in which time he should inherit a sum of five thousand pounds. But he said he was so afraid of the fact of his having borrowed money reaching the ears of the dying old woman who had made a will in his favor, that Mr. Esdaile had himself proposed drawing the check for Jelfrey in the name of a friend.

"I believed this lie, just as he said it. I know now that I was mad and blind; but he had a wonderful influence over me, and I never suspected. I offered the check he gave me, firmly believing it to be Mr. Esdaile's own. From the time the knowledge dawned upon me I was miserable, only praying him to restore the money, or to free me from my oath of silence. He could do neither yet, he told me, entreating my forbearance just for a little longer. But I have no written proof of this, and what is my word worth against the facts? Nothing will save me; but, before God, I am innocent."

"Oh, Rachel!" I cried, when it seemed plain to us, "why did he blot it? I could have told this at the trial; I could have told the judge the truth."

"Perhaps his own impulse was the wisest, my dear."

"But why?" I cried. "He would not have written it, if it had not been true."

"He crossed the words out for some reason," Rachel said, very pityingly; "it must have been to prevent your having any knowledge of the transaction, and so guard against your testimony being necessary."

"Then, why did he write them at all?"

"He wrote them instinctively, dear, no doubt," she said, "in his desire for you to know the truth."

"Then, why did he not tear them off?" I moaned, holding the letter tight in my clasped hands.

"Don't you see that on the opposite side of the sheet is written what he does really want you to read? Perhaps he had no more paper."

And then—just hearing those few commonplace words which told of his helplessness—the tears, that are so seldom in my eyes now, rushed to them; and I sobbed in Rachel's arms until I had not strength left me to go back; so she put me to sleep in her own bed, just as she might have put a little child.

To-morrow I leave here. Once more I am starting on a new path. Is it wrong and untrustful to wonder where it will lead? Oh! I will try so hard to do my duty; and perhaps, as God is always pitiful, this home will not be closed against me as others have been. Yet the old haunting presentiment is still with me, and I can not feel that the sorrow of my life and Gerard's can be taken away for long years to come, even if ever.

Oh! I hope it is right (at least, not wrong) for me to be going to High Athelston, tempted only by that offer of one hundred pounds salary. So much of that I shall be able to save for Gerard!

Is all love of money real avarice? If so, what an almost universal sin it must be! I was thinking to-night, as I came home with Rachel, of that last evening at home when Gerard told Aunt Jessie he would redeem his name. Poor Gerard!—poor Gerard! If I could only know what he does in that hard life of his—so far away from me—that I might follow him all the more closely, day by day, in my thoughts! Four years more, and he will be free; and through that time I shall be helping him. There, that shall be my last thought to-night—almost a glad one.

END OF MAGDALEN'S DIARY.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE DUSK.

THE chill November shadows were creeping in upon Lina, when she closed the book at last, and slowly rose with it in her hand. Her face was pained in its white stillness, and her eyes had a dreamy sorrow in them which it was sad to see, as she locked up the book again, and, standing by the window, looked out far off among the hills.

"Now it is time to go to Gerard," she thought, a quiet patience struggling into her beautiful eyes. "Then, after I have seen him, the way will lie clear before me. I feel so old and tired now to begin it all again—alone. Ah! if only he might think it safe for me to go with him."

Once more, noiselessly and unobserved in her dark dress, Lina crept down to the west door, then through the park and out into the lane, where the dusk deepened fast among the arched trees.

Dorcas Cheere, standing just within her cottage-door and preparing to lock herself in, saw the girl walk up the garden-path, and waited a moment to enjoy the opportunity of letting out a little superfluous viciousness.

"He's out," she snapped, coming a step forward, as Lina tapped softly at the artist's door; "and a blessed thing it is for some of us when he *is* out."

"Has he been gone long?" asked Lina, timidly.

"Not a bit too long," returned Dorcas, jerking out the words, "considering how he goes on when he's here. It makes one frightened of being alone in one's house, to see him come to his door and talk to any begging vagabond that chooses to try him. If he hasn't money to send his boy to school, he oughtn't to have money to give *them*. There was one here just as he was going out, and he must turn back, forsooth! to get him money—a skulking ticket-of-leave man, I'll be bound! I keep my door locked, for it's more likely to be my things they're after than his—as he hasn't any."

But Dorcas, sharply as she spoke, had eyes to see the deathly pallor which crept to Lina's very lips at her words.

"You'd better come in and rest a bit, Miss Chester," she said, modifying her tone a little.

But Lina, faltering her thanks, turned away, and, following the winding field-path behind the cottages, came presently out into the valley, where the shadows glided swift and dim.

No sign of Gerard yet; and the small dark figure hurried on in that great solitude among the hills, which echoed so drearily the solitude of her heart. No sign of Gerard yet; and the shadows came on and wrapped themselves about her, chilling her until she shivered as we shiver when some awful unknown evil nears us. No sign of Gerard yet, and she dared not call. Hill behind hill, hill beyond hill, she searched the whole expanse, with a great dread in her wide and desolate eyes; but there was no sign of Gerard yet.

At last, upon the narrow path beyond the water-fall, she saw a group of figures coming toward her, and her heart leaped with relief and thankfulness. It was some moments still before she could recognize them, and then the fear crept slowly back—a greater fear than it had been before. The two boys were together on Jack Esdaile's pony, and beside them rode Louisa Castillain, who had joined them higher up the valley, because she knew who had been asked to meet them. And there was no one else.

Slowly Lina went on toward the path on which they rode. Beyond this path, and above it, lay the silent tarn in the deep shadow, and beside this tarn—almost close beside it—two men had met upon the narrow footway which ran so near its treacherous waters; and the words that left their lips were those hot words of fierce, ungovernable rage which can be rarely either heard or uttered a second time in any man's life.

The two horses came on. Lina heard a shout of recognition from the lips of the boys on the pony, and she knew that they, too, could see her brother and Eustace Jelfrey. She knew Miss Castillain's eyes took in all the scene; yet Lina thought she saw nothing in all the world but the two men who stood there, strong and defiant; knowing nothing of those who watched them, knowing only that they had met in the solitude, and that strength and cowardice, revenge and hatred, justice and injustice, would not rest with words alone—even such words as those.

Lina started forward, trembling helplessly;

one dread only filling her heart and urging her steps. Gerard knew nothing of the mine beneath the water. To Gerard this was only a shallow mountain lake. Could she reach him in time?

Her steps were weak and nerveless, as if she were trying to run in a dream. Louisa Castillain drew up her horse as the small, dark figure passed across the bridle-road. There was still the slight ascent to climb; to Lina it seemed like a terrific mountain in her way, while her steps faltered in their haste and fear.

The two men, with flashing eyes and ringing words of hate, had met in a close and savage embrace; and had not seen her. A few more steps —only a few more: slow and tedious, but only a few more! Before half of these few steps were taken, Lina had fallen to the ground as if the unseen hand of death had smitten her in an instant; for the wide, watching eyes had seen the end; then closed in sudden blindness.

Lina had seen how the man who had been wronged fought with the man who for years had wronged him, and how, with a fierce and frantic strength, he had flung him back into the water whose secret he did not know, and then had left the spot; walking quite slowly in the opposite direction, but still never seeing her. And other eyes had seen the end too. Louisa Castillain had seen how the man whom nobody knew and nobody cared for fought with the man she loved; and how, with a murderous strength, he had hurled him into the water, which meant death, and then had turned away deliberately, because the deed was done.

And the boys had seen how the man who had always had pleasant, merry words for both, and womanly care for one, fought with the man from whom both shrunk with an instinctive antipathy. And even *they* knew, as they clung tremblingly to each other, that, in this dusk among the hills to-day, an awful deed had been committed, of which they knew the name, though the horror of its meaning had never entered into the heart of either; and now it seemed as if a voice were whispering it to them again and again, in this new and terrible experience.

And Louisa Castillain, too, as she galloped wildly down the valley, felt this one word whispered about her, and echoing from hill to hill.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOUISA'S TIDINGS.

The shabby phaeton, which was the only vehicle Marjorie Castillain was allowed to drive, stood at the post-office door, half-way down the steep street of Churchill.

Marjorie had no idea that her custom was valued by Mr. Johnson Mathers, or that her visits were pleasant to him; she thought far too lowly of herself, and far too meanly of her financial resources, to imagine either the one or the other; but certain it is that, since he had helped her on the day she went to him with her first request, she had made as many errands to the shop as she could, and avoided, in that delicate thoughtfulness which recognized the debt of gratitude, the same to the postmaster as to the highest gentleman in the land, allowing any of her trivial orders to be included in Louisa's, when she sent up to a London stationer. And Mr. Mathers instinctively understood all this, and it made him value more the genial, gentle brightness of the girl who always had been his favorite (if his smallest) customer.

The pleasant "good-afternoon" had been spoken, and Marjorie was passing through the door which he held open, when Sir Neil Athelston, on the opposite side of the road, caught sight of her, and crossed.

"Alone, Marjorie?" he asked, as they shook hands. The words sounded careless enough, but the young baronet's eyes were unusually intent as he asked the question.

"Yes, alone," she answered, lightly; "why not? Louie has ridden Tristram up the valley, and will ride back with Jack Esdaile. Louie adores Jack Esdaile."

"*Erratum*—read the initials reversed," put in Neil, coolly. "But, Marjorie," he added, in a tone so unconsciously anxious that Marjorie guessed in a moment at the motive of his question, "tell me where you have been, and who has been with you all this day. You told me at the ball last night that you would come to High Athelston to-day."

"And I intend to do so, Neil," replied Marjorie, her voice catching the anxiety of his. "Where are you going now?"

"To the rectory. I have been deluded into some appointment with our two active magistrates, Jorden and Stuart, and I suppose, unnecessary as I may be, I must not fail to be there to meet them."

"Of course not," laughed Marjorie, "being high-sheriff. What an awe-inspiring meeting, Neil—two magistrates and a sheriff! Shall I come, self-invited, and introduce a little counter-element?"

"I wish you would," he answered, absently, little guessing how unheeded her presence was to be when she *did* come. "But the fact is, Marjorie, I thought you had Miss Chester with you. My mother is at Burton, and so I thought that, as you are always so good to Miss Chester, you would have taken her out, or called to see her, or done something to make this leisure day a kind of holiday to her."

"But you must have known (seeing her at home) that she was not with me."

And Marjorie, a little frightened—she hardly knew why, except that she was always prepared for sorrowful tidings of Lina—spoke far more earnestly than she wot of.

"But I have not seen her to-day," the young man said. "Martin found out that she was in her room all morning, but she could not have staid there until I left at dusk—could she, Marjorie?"

"Hardly," said Marjorie, tersely. "Neil, I will walk on with you. Shall I tell James to keep the phaeton here to take us back?"

"Not necessary," Neil answered, readily, by no means relishing the idea of driving the ancient Hawkedale quadruped. "My dog-cart is to follow me to the rectory. I enjoyed the walk into the town, but don't care for it back again. Let me drive you, Marjorie, and send James home."

She did as he bid her, and they turned and walked up the street together, many eyes following the handsome young couple, whose marriage-

day would not be long in coming now, and would be a holiday for Churchill.

"Will you come into the formidable rectory study, then, Marjorie," Sir Neil inquired, "and make out a case to divert us?"

"To give you something to do? The talented young sheriff has had no opportunity yet for displaying his ideas of justice."

"Churchill is such a stupidly cautious and exemplary spot," he answered, still with the absent tone in his voice. "Our magistrates never have a case worth hearing. Can't you bring us one?"

"I could take papa up," mused Marjorie, "for robbing me of every luxury; but I don't think of any thing definite against— Neil," she added, suddenly breaking off in her forced jest, "is there any *reason* for Miss Chester keeping her own room to-day?"

"Reason?" he echoed, astonished. "Why, Marjorie, what reason could she have to-day more than on any other day?"

"I don't know," ruminated Marjorie, "but one never knows what may have been disc— may have happened in one's absence; and so—and so, at any rate, I am at liberty to ask," she concluded, with a forced laugh.

"No," Neil answered, wondering now at her earnestness, "nothing has happened; indeed, I don't see what could have happened. Have *you* heard any thing, Marjorie?"

She raised her face suddenly to his, a grave wistfulness in her eyes, as she answered, almost solemnly,

"If I *did* hear any thing, Neil, what difference would that make? No friend of mine would ever be doubted in my heart because of any thing I had heard. Neil, should *you* believe evil things of one you had learned to respect? Could you—could you ever do it, Neil?"

He was wondering at her tone, half inclined to smile, when a sudden idea struck him.

"Marjorie, can you be thinking of Miss Chester when you say this?"

"I need not be thinking of any one in particular," she answered, rather quickly. "Look how fast some one is riding down the valley. From the rectory garden, we shall be able to see who it is."

So, in the garden, they turned a little aside among the shrubs, to look over the hedge into the valley. A boy was hastily opening the gate which led from it into the road, and through the opened gate the horse and rider came on without a pause.

"Tristram — Louie — I declare it is Louie!" cried Marjorie, starting a little; "alone, and in haste! I wonder why?"

"Rare event," laughed Neil. "I wonder whether Louisa has ever been in a hurry before in all her life."

Even before the words were all uttered, Louisa had turned Tristram, and drawn him up at the rectory gate. Neil moved forward and opened it for her, but she passed him without a word, cantering on up the sloping drive.

"Stop, Louie, stop!" cried Marjorie, in a breathless voice, subdued in all its eagerness. "Stop one moment, Louie, and tell *us* first."

Neil stood astonished. "Tell what?" he questioned.

But Marjorie did not heed him in her eagerness, and Louisa did not heed either of them. She drew up Tristram at the door, and, dismounting with Neil's ready help, but giving him no word or glance of thanks, passed into the house; her face flushed in odd, fluctuating patches, under her stiff, high hat; her habit sweeping behind her, over the red-and-white tiles. Marjorie followed her; so white and frightened-looking that Neil, seeing her, started forward, and laid his hand upon her arm.

"Marjorie, in Heaven's name, what has frightened you?"

A strange, dreamy smile stirred her lips, but her brows were drawn with pain.

"Louisa will tell us what it is," she said, most sadly, yet sarcastically, too. "Wait a minute, she will tell us. Who could do it better?"

In the hall, just at the study door, Emily Jorden met them.

"I saw you coming," she said, smiling shyly at Sir Neil, and then linking her arm within Marjorie's, in the clinging attitude she loved. "If you are going into the study, I may come too, but I dare not go alone. Papa has some solemn meetings there. Oh, I should be afraid of hearing them! Not that I should be scolded," she added, with her innocent upraised glance past Marjorie's thoughtful face. "Papa never scolds *me*."

"Spoiled child!" returned Sir Neil, recognizing himself appealed to.

"Am I spoiled, Marjorie?" she asked, evidently relishing his pleasant, lazy patronage. "Am I spoiled more than other girls?"

"I don't know," rejoined Marjorie, her face full of another thought. "I suppose it's the same all the world over. All the roses fall to one, all the thorns to another."

They had entered now the long, comfortable room which Mr. Jorden called his study, and he had risen in astonishment from the easy-chair, in which he had sat deliberating with Colonel Stuart, who, leaving the fellow-chair unoccupied, stood upon the rug with his back to the fire.

The rector glanced in surprise from one to another, as his visitors entered unannounced; but the colonel's grave eyes sought rapidly and instinctively for some unusual reason — sought it first in Miss Castillain's face, and last in her sister's. Before they had turned from hers, Louisa had spoken, and made his one faint, unacknowledged doubt into a certainty.

"Mr. Jorden—Colonel Stuart," she cried, approaching them rapidly, "come quick, or send, or do something! Mr. Jelfrey has been killed in the valley, and thrown into the pool—the old mine, you know! I—I saw it done; I saw him murdered!"

She stopped here, overcome by her anger and her grief. But a minute afterward she repeated the words with sudden strength and heat, "I saw him murdered!"

The unbreathed word among the hills had found at last a voice which would not shrink from uttering it.

"Miss Castillain," said Colonel Stuart, with cold gravity, though the color had rushed even into *his* calm face, "be careful what you say, even here, among friends only; for no single word can be retracted."

"I saw it!" she cried again, in quick, assured eagerness. "Why should I retract true words? I saw him murdered!"

"Is it too late for help?" put in Marjorie. "We have had the boat-house drag at Hawkedale, and it is there now. Please send for it, Mr. Jorden—a man on horseback; and he can leave word for them to bring the little boat. But do have the drag at once!"

Mr. Jorden had his hand on the bell, when Colonel Stuart stopped him.

"Would you object to taking the order to the man yourself?" he said. "Why should we have this presently talked of all over the town, and have a crowd to hinder us, too?"

"I see," the rector assented. "I will not bring the servants in here."

When he returned from speaking to his groom, Louisa was still talking of what she had seen.

"Will he be in time?" asked Marjorie of him, in a voice of intense anxiety.

"If any man could," the rector answered, laying his hand with fatherly tenderness upon her clasped fingers. But I fear it is too late for such help to be of any avail. It must have been either too late or unnecessary even from the moment your sister left the tarn; too late to have saved him if he fell down the shaft; unnecessary if he only slipped into the water around it. He is an excellent swimmer, and would have rescued himself in such a case. Miss Castillain, did you wait at all after the deed was done?"

"No," sobbed Louisa; "I galloped off at once for help. Oh, if it is too late it will be your fault! Why do you stay here?"

"Though all help may be impossible," said Sir Neil, his handsome face as white and perplexed as the faces about him, "we need not waste even these few moments. We are all ready."

"One thing, Miss Castillain," interposed the rector; "did you ride straight and fast from the mine here?"

"I started at once, and never stopped. I saw it all. I saw distinctly the man who did it; so did others."

"You need not tell us yet," put in Colonel Stuart, quietly, as he moved to the door.

"Jack saw it," cried Louisa, in sharp, quick tones, between her sobs; "and," she added, while the colonel's eyes met hers in pained surprise; "and the man's own son saw it—the murderer's own son!"

"What!" cried Sir Neil, with a sudden start, "you don't mean—great Heaven! Louisa, you don't mean that—that *Spendir* has murdered Jelfrey?"

"Who else—who else?" Louisa almost shrieked, in a tone both malevolent and miserable. "I saw him, and the boys saw him, and Miss Chester saw him."

Colonel Stuart, his hand upon the door, stopped as her words reached him, a sudden mist before his eyes. Sir Neil, in the act of rebuttoning his overcoat, started as if the few sharp words had struck him.

From Marjorie's tightened lips a cry of real and bitter pain escaped, which made Neil, in all his haste and agitation, turn with a quick and anxious look of sympathy which was quite new to his indolent eyes. For one instant she laid her hands pleadingly upon his arm, and seemed wishful to speak; but then, with a sudden stinging recollection, she drew them away, and stood back while he passed her in his haste.

Then, out in the hall, she stopped beside Colonel Stuart, the pleading look deepening and saddening her eyes.

"Colonel Stuart," she said, "you remember how lonely she is, and how young, and how weak, and how—how much more friendless than any of us. Oh! need *her* evidence be called against him?"

"Please God, she is not there," he answered, in the same low tone, smiling a little into the eyes that were so beautiful now in their child-like wistfulness. "I will remember."

Only three words, yet so full of tender sympathy and brave hope, that her heart leaped gratefully within her.

"Oh, make haste, make haste!" sobbed Louisa, hurrying through the hall, her tone so sharp and penetrating that it was the first to rouse the curiosity of the servants.

"Where did you leave her, exactly?" asked Sir Neil, thinking it unnecessary to explain of whom he spoke.

"I don't know whom you mean," stammered Miss Castillain, stubbornly, her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Where did you leave Miss Chester?" he said, his raised voice sterner and more abrupt than she had ever heard it before.

"At the tarn, close to it—I think. At any rate, she was there at the time," rejoined Miss Castillain, not so much confused as careless; "I saw her running toward them."

"Them! Do you know that you are implicating Mr. Jelfrey, too?" put in the rector, stopping her. "Don't say any more yet, please, Miss Castillain."

"But Sir Neil asked me about Miss Chester," she sobbed, with renewed tears; "and I tell him I saw her running toward Mr. Spendir as he struck the blow—" her grief had not quite deprived Louisa of her cunning—"and when she saw he had killed him she fainted. How could I wait to see more when I wanted help?"

And then Louisa's sobs seemed to overcome her utterly.

But Neil took no trouble to offer even a soothing word.

"I shall find her," he muttered, with contemptuous lips.

"Oh! what shall we do?" cried Emily Jorden, weeping bitterly, and clinging to her father's arm. "Will it be too late?"

"Hush!" he said, appeasingly; "let us hope it is all well. It is possible, dear. Ah! thank Heaven! there's Sir Neil's dog-cart coming up the lawn. Go to mamma, my pet; I shall soon be back."

If there had been a hundred lives at stake, the father would have had time for his child's kiss.

"Quick!" cried Sir Neil, springing to his seat, and holding the furs aside for Mr. Jorden to take his place beside him; while the colonel swiftly mounted behind, and, on his own responsibility, told Ridley he would not be wanted. Cautiously Neil held in the fresh, thorough-bred horses, and bent to speak to Marjorie, raising his hat instinctively as he did so.

"You were always her friend, Marjorie," he said. "Be satisfied, dear—I will find her."

"I am coming," she answered, coldly; but he did not hear. His selfish impatience dominating over every other thought, he urged on his horses down the slope; and soon they were ra-

cing over the shadowy turf, Louisa Castillain, who had mounted again, following as rapidly as she could.

"Emily," whispered Marjorie, entreating as Miss Jorden had never heard her entreat before, "lend me your horse and your skirt, will you? Nothing else—I can not wait for any thing else. Fetch the skirt, and I'll saddle the horse myself."

Deftly and rapidly she did it, ran back into the house for a moment to change her skirt, then mounted without assistance, and cantered on, with tightened rein, beside the swollen brook.

Long before the dog-cart reached the tarn, she had left Louisa behind, and she only slackened speed when she saw the three gentlemen standing in the gloom beside the water.

Only those three, she said to herself, with a gasp that sounded like relief. She joined them with a quiet pain upon her face; but the water—growing darker and darker every moment now, as the long November night drew on—held its secret safely. She turned sick and faint as she stood there, for to her heart also was whispered now that one miserable word whose echo must linger for evermore about this spot.

"If he had saved himself," remarked Mr. Jorden, "we should have seen him. I have no further hope of that. There is no trace of his struggling to shore."

"There are traces of a struggle here," said Colonel Stuart, who had been cautiously examining the foot-path which skirted the edge of the water. "There are foot-marks here of more than one."

"Yes," answered his brother magistrate, gravely, "it must have ended with that deadly act. This will be a painful business."

And then there was a short and puzzled silence among them, and not one but wished that he had not been sheriff or magistrate just then.

"I suppose, Sir Neil," Mr. Jorden said at last, "I must first send the police to Mr. Spendir's cottage."

Neil answered moodily that he supposed so. His thoughts hardly followed the rector's words; and Marjorie knew this.

"Neil," she whispered, her sweet voice very low and earnest, "do not go on to-night. Dear Neil, it will be kindest not to seek her."

"Absurd!" he answered, with a gesture of impatience; "she has been frightened, and is alone. Where is your womanly pity?"

"The pity I feel," returned Marjorie, hurt at his tone, but still gently entreating him, "I wish you could understand—oh, I wish you could! Don't seek her, Neil."

But again he spurned her words, in eager, petulant haste.

"Real pity for her I see you can not understand," she said then, coldly. "Go and bring her back here, if you will. You have been cruel to her always; crown it with this last and meanest cruelty."

He hardly seemed to understand what she was saying.

"Must I go to this fellow's cottage before I have my own liberty, Jorden?" he asked, haughtily.

"I should like you to do so. I think we ought," the rector said.

"And we may perhaps see Miss Chester *there*," put in Colonel Stuart, to delay him; "she is very likely to have gone with the boys, either there or to The Anchorage."

But Colonel Stuart knew that Lina Chester's one great effort would be to go as far away from all of them as she could—he knew it even better than Marjorie did, because he knew what would be her reason.

"If we are bound to go, before—before we do any thing else," put in Sir Neil, in his inborn impatience, let us go at once, for Heaven's sake! If you will drive for me, Stuart, I will walk across the field-path to the cottages. I shall be there as soon as you are, and—"

He did not finish the sentence, but they all knew that he went in the hope of meeting or overtaking Lina, in the path which she would be sure to have taken if she had intended to go to the cottages.

In driving through the town the rector was detained again and again; once for quite half an hour by a fellow-clergyman, who had driven from a distance on purpose to see him, and could not be kept in town in the deepening gloom of the evening. Through these hinderances Colonel Stuart waited patiently, rejoicing over each one, and lengthening it as much as possible.

"Had you not better go on, colonel?" Mr. Jorden whispered, as another delay occurred from one of his own curates. "I don't like to show I'm in haste. Sir Neil will have arrived at the cottage already, so that will be all right, and I wish to avoid suspicion."

"Of course—of course," assented the colonel, with remarkable promptness. "Don't hasten, and whatever you do, avoid all appearance of excitement. I don't mind how long I wait for you."

And so it chanced that when at last they reached the cottages in Nether Lane, Sir Neil was at the gate waiting for them; his face to the road, white and angry and perplexed.

"We need not wait," he said, when the horses stopped; "we need none of us wait here."

"Is there no fear of his escaping us?" inquired Mr. Jorden, as Sir Neil still stood, without offering to take his seat.

"No fear," the baronet answered, so decisively that neither of them for a moment questioned his word. "You will come on with me—and dine?" Neil asked, as if his thoughts were far away from the dining, yet as if he dreaded the going back.

"Miss Chester was not at the cottage, then?" inquired Colonel Stuart, asking the question as frankly and genially as he could, when the rector had declined Sir Neil's invitation, on plea of work at home.

"No."

"Then, if you will walk on, Athelston," said the colonel, seeing he wished it, "I will drive back and bring Miss Marjorie to High Athelston."

Neil understood the delicate kindness of this plan, and smiled his thanks, as he shook hands with the rector and turned away.

"What can he have heard or seen in there?" questioned Mr. Jorden, as they turned and drove on down the darkening lane. "Something has perplexed and hurt him—enraged him too. And yet below it all is some other thought which is engrossing him. Can it possibly be anxiety about Miss Chester?"

Colonel Stuart drove on in silence. There was no need to tell how sure he was of this.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TWO ATHELSTONS.

THE water in that tarn among the hills still rippled in widening circles which told so much, and yet so little, when Fitz Spendir (his face set in hard, stern lines, though he was quite cool to all outward seeming) walked on past the waterfall, making—almost unconsciously—a wide circuit before he took the foot-path across the hill to Nether Lane.

He turned the key in the door, and entered his cottage with a listless step. Bare and chill and empty the room looked to him, as he hesitated a moment within the threshold.

"What matter," he muttered, pushing the hair from his sunburned face, "what matter how cheerless? It can hardly look more solitary even when we have left it—for he will be doubly bent upon our leaving now. Poor Jet! Poor laddie! It was almost cruel, after all, to rescue the boy only just to link his life with mine. My life! What a grand problem it has been! Well, I have spoken to that villain to-night for the first time since he taught me, five years ago, how black a man's heart *could* be; taught me other lessons too, good lessons—useful lessons. My God! I dare remember this, and know that it was only into a shallow pond I flung him! Why, the whole ocean could not wash away the blackness of his foul heart; and I only threw him *there*. He, the best swimmer in all Highshire—unless the weight of his mean crimes—"

Fitz—busy now arranging his work—broke off with a laugh, keen and sarcastic, but hardly bitter; there seemed even now to belong no bitterness to the handsome bronzed face and the warm, brave eyes.

"I'm sorry I didn't go on to meet the lad," he thought, bending busily over his pencil; "but, somehow, he went out of my head entirely, and it's no use going back now. He can well take care of himself, poor little fellow; he has had practice enough, at any rate, to keep his hand in. I must have a light, but I can leave the shutters open to guide him."

So, beside the lamp in the unshuttered room, the artist was sitting, intent and occupied, when, from the gloom without, that was not darkness even yet, Sir Neil Athelston came in to him.

At the opening of the door, Fitz had raised his head with a welcoming glance, thinking to see Jet. When his eyes met Sir Neil's, they darkened suddenly and strangely.

"An unexpected honor," he said, looking coolly at the young baronet, and leaning back in his stiff, hard chair. "To what do I owe the charm of this surprise?"

Sir Neil was anxious, evidently anxious, else his face would have illustrated more vividly the haughtiness of the thoughts which stirred within him at the artist's words.

"I wonder you venture to ask," he said; "you are too fresh from your crime to need a reminder of it, and I do not covet the pleasure of recapitulating it."

"I should be glad to know to what crime you refer," put in Fitz, deliberately. "I am accustomed to having crimes laid to my charge, but I like clearness in the accusation. Go on; I have no other objection to offer—merely that one of vagueness in the charge brought against me."

"Confound it!" exclaimed Sir Neil, hotly, "what do you mean by speaking to me so?—you, a murderer! A fellow who ought to be in prison now—who *will* be in prison before an hour is over!"

"Oh, in prison!" echoed Fitz, in a voice whose strange, slow gravity struck on his listener's ear. "Quite a pleasant place, when you're used to it. My lines always *have* fallen in pleasant places though, as somebody says; and so I've learned to expect it. Have you any prospect to hold out to me beyond that general one of a prison, Neil Athelston?"

"I should think you have but one prospect to hold out for yourself," Neil answered, feeling a little at a disadvantage, in spite of his pride and authoritativeness. "Evidence is too strong against you, even for you to hope for life. Four people saw you fling Jelfrey down the shaft of the old mine. Few men care to commit murder in presence of so many witnesses."

Fitz rose quite leisurely, and, leaning against the chimney opposite Sir Neil, gazed at him steadfastly, almost curiously; no sign in face or attitude of the great, cold qualm which almost stilled his heart-beats.

"Life!" he repeated, ironically; "and suppose I do not hope for life. How are you noble distributors of justice going to relieve me of it?"

"These questions are absurd," interposed Sir Neil, growing uncomfortable under the gaze of the clear, dauntless eyes. "You know what the law demands of those who take life; and you know how you have taken life to-day. By Jove! I didn't come to tell you of it, but to have you taken, and—and to—"

Sir Neil Athelston was not doing himself credit in this interview, and he knew it. He had entered the cottage for the purpose of annihilating the murderer, without condescending to lower himself to explain any thing; and here was the murderer questioning him with a manner cool and proud and self-possessed as his own—or more so. Besides that, he had come to ask a question on another subject, or to make some hoped-for discovery; and here he was hesitating over the question, and as far from being able to discover where Lina Chester might be, as he had been out in the darkening valley, where he had sought for her in vain.

"Have I the pleasure of receiving you as an amateur policeman, then?" asked Fitz, calmly.

"We have no need of amateurs in the case," rejoined the young baronet, with sternness. "There will be professional ones here presently."

"Then you may sit there, near the door, keeping your self-imposed guard," remarked Fitz, with a slight, haughty gesture to one—the most distant from the fire—of the three chairs which were all the room contained. Did you bring the handcuffs?"

Neil Athelston was as incapable of sounding the depths of scorn and defiance hidden under these leisurely words as he was of understanding the intense muscular earnestness of the man before him. What could he comprehend of the teachings of a proud, wronged, hunted life like this? How could he fathom a heart that had been bright and brave and hopeful through years of the deepest humiliation which can be suffered under God's wide and merciful heaven?

What had his pampered nature ever had to battle with, that any experience of *his* could bring him near enough to this man to understand any thing in his words beyond their arrogance? But yet he treated them in the wisest way in which a wiser man could have done, for he treated them as if they had not been uttered.

Passing the chair which had been so coolly assigned him he came up to the table on which the artist's block and brushes lay. And now the one only earnest purpose which had ever stirred him gave his face an eagerness which Fitz, from his lounging position opposite, studied with keen intentness.

"Where did Miss Chester go after she left the lake?" he asked. "Tell me that, Spendir; we have no other matter to settle now—you and I."

"We *have* another matter to settle now, you and I," echoed Fitz, contemptuously. "It may just as well be settled here, and now, though I have the satisfaction of being able to look forward to another interview in a larger apartment, and where a more comfortable seat will be at your disposal. The prisoner and the high-sheriff will not need to say much to each other then; though your position there will make no more difference in my valuation of *you*, Neil Athelston, than my position there will make in your valuation of *me*. If you were sheriff of a hundred counties," he went on, his eyes feverishly hot, while Sir Neil hardly comprehended the keenness of the satire of his last words, "you don't suppose I could look upon you, or on any of your house, with any thing but scorn and contempt. *Your* house, mind; I am in no hurry to call it mine. Yet such a fame as mine will be to-morrow, as mine has been now for years, is but a fitting one for the head of such a house."

"I do not understand you," put in Sir Neil, feeling it a trouble to try to do so. "Will you tell me where—"

"*Don't* you understand me?" questioned Fitz, with a slow emphasis. "Well, I will try to make it clear enough for your intellect, if you will kindly assist me by exhibiting some sign upon your face when a gleam of intelligence reaches you. Do you recollect this little sketch? You have seen it before, and I asked you then whether you should recognize the spot if you saw it. Perhaps you never may see it; but *I* shall. In spite of the handcuffs and the dock, I shall have liberty for that. Look at it well; not to criticise it as you did before, when you bored yourself to death here for an hour, because Miss Chester came—your long pursuit of *her* has been a blacker crime than that which you kindly say will hang me!—but look at it," he resumed, checking his hot words with a strong and violent effort, "to fix it on your mind. In that church was celebrated, and is registered—*is registered*—the marriage of Sir Gerard Athelston and his first wife; the wife whose name was the same as the name upon that grave over which she walked—she and her husband, and the clergyman who had married them—and who lies in her own grave now, suffering no longer from the pain she was made to suffer from one of your noble, upright, truthful race. I shall find that register some day, and then you shall see how well your name and title fit the convict and the murderer. You look astonished! If you had lived *my* life, none *of these trifles would* astonish you. Perhaps these sins of mine will be new ones among the Athelstons, but no one then will ever speak of them or think of them. The world smiles just the same upon the Athelstons, innocent or guilty. Their sins are not the same as the sins of lower men. I dare say—I dare say," mused Fitz, with the slowest, keenest satire, "that they will elect me high-sheriff then!"

"You are simply insane to talk in this way," interposed Sir Neil, moved by a hundred feelings at once, and hardly comprehending what they were, except that a hope that this guilty man might be wandering in his mind, battled with a fear in which there seemed a strange, truthful strength which he could not define. "You are simply insane to talk so. If your mother imagined—"

"Great heavens! *you* name my mother to me!" cried Fitz, standing upright now upon the hearth, his broad chest heaving, his eyes literally burning in the torture of their passion, his strong hand clenched and bloodless. "Go away from me! Do you stand there and speak to me of these things on purpose to tempt me? My God! how hard it is to keep my—"

"Mr. Spendir," said Sir Neil, in almost a pacific tone, for the violence of the artist's agitation, and the intense effort of the strain he put upon himself, alarmed as well as astonished him, "tell me where Miss Chester is."

"I don't know," returned Fitz, the words almost a whisper in their forced quietness.

"That is not true," blurted out Sir Neil, in his impatience.

"Isn't it?" questioned Fitz, his clenched hands behind him, and his wide, sunburned forehead drawn into countless lines. "Then I begin to think you recognize me as an Athelston; father and son, *they*'ve been liars for many a generation."

"I think it's more than time the handcuffs were here," said the baronet, savagely; "and I can leave the finding of Miss Chester to the police. They will manage, I dare say, as they will be obliged to find her in time for her to give her evidence at your trial."

The cruel words had not been planned to stab, but there was a little exultation in the baronet's mind when he saw that they did so.

"You have pretended to care for her," Fitz said, an awful pallor on his face, as he curbed his passionate temper, and lowered his hot, fierce tones; "you have seemed to wish to spare her. Now, you could spare her this, and will not."

"I wish to see her," returned Neil, moodily; "and if she should tell me—"

"*She* tell you!" ejaculated Fitz, haughtily. "She will tell you nothing about me; and she is not Athelston enough to utter a falsehood. Listen"—the curbed emotion of the man was almost terrible as he came forward a little, and spoke with angry earnestness—"listen: I will wait here, quiet and tame—ay, as quiet and tame as if I were used to it—for my summons to jail, if you will not seek *her*. You need not fear my escaping; only—only let her escape. In Heaven's name, spare her this!"

"There's no fear of your escaping, in any case, I think," muttered Sir Neil; "you need not make any unnecessary promises about that. Just tell me where Miss Chester is—that's all I want of you."

"You have deigned to admire Miss Chester," said Fitz, with a slow, bitter smile. "It's a pity, isn't it, that the fate of a murderer should be entangled with her fate? Lowering, eh, to the Athelston pride and purity?"

"Tell me where she is," struck in Sir Neil, beginning to fear he should win no answer. "I have no wish to be detained longer."

"And I have no wish to detain you," the artist answered, with a slight, haughty bow. "I would quite as soon have one of the Churchill constables; he would manage the thing better."

"I shall not forget those words. By Jove! I shall not!" exclaimed Sir Neil, losing all command over himself. "You shall rue this—you, whose hands are black with crime!"

"Are they?" Fitz said, leisurely examining his strong brown fingers; "are they? Yes, I see they are blacker than yours. But then—let me see—is it the blackness of the *hands* that signifies most?"

"You evidently know where Miss Chester is," put in Sir Neil, going back to his one most serious idea, "and you can not keep the secret long! I would not advise you to try. All these things will tell against you, you know."

"A thousand things will tell against me," replied Fitz, with bitter coldness; "a hundred memories now will help to drag me to my death."

"But something may be done," interrupted Sir Neil, hoping at last that he might, by soothing means, win the information he wished to obtain. But though the words sounded almost kind, Fitz knew the selfish desire which prompted them.

"Something will be done," he answered, quietly, "and these hundred tongues and memories will help it on. But I can not die until I find that little church; then I can die an Athelston—the first one whom the law has tenderly taken in hand. Are you growing tired now of your voluntary guard over the criminal?" he added, almost laughing. "I should like to see you take a chair and make yourself comfortable, as befits the high sheriff. Excuse my not entertaining you, but I wish to finish this illustration before your friends and followers bring me the handcuffs."

To Sir Neil the simple idea of this man's trying to escape justice seemed absurd, as he watched him seat himself quietly at his work, and immediately become engrossed in it. There was something, under these circumstances, so ludicrous in the idea of his staying there on his fruitless errand, that he walked away from the cottage without another word; and had only reached the gate, when the dog-cart came up, with Mr. Jorden and Colonel Stuart. No wonder that they thought he looked angry and vexed and baffled.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PREPARING FOR ESCAPE.

ALONE in his chill and almost fireless room, Fitz Spendir rose and stood before that sketch of which he and Sir Neil had been talking. Long and sadly he gazed upon it, his firm lips shaking as he did so; then, still standing there in the silence, he covered his eyes, as if the sight of it had grown into pain for him. So Jet, entering the room timidly and gravely as he had never entered it before, found him, nearly half an hour afterward.

"I've been to The Anchorage, dad," the child said, nervously, as he approached him. "I—I didn't think where I was going until I saw—and—and—I think Jack's pony went without us knowing."

Fitz had quickly dropped his hand, and now he looked, with a long and questioning gaze, at the little face below him.

"Laddie," he said, in his rich, gentle tones, "what has frightened you?"

"Nothing," the little white lips stammered, in their horror and their great love.

"What have you seen?" the man continued, gently drawing the boy toward him. "Tell me exactly. Don't shrink away from me. Tell me what you saw. I can not hurt you, laddie; you are not afraid of *me?*"

The voice which the lad had always known so prompt and bright and jesting was almost wistful now; and still there came no kiss from the childish lips, and no caresses from the little hands.

"Oh, father!" he cried, piteously, "don't ask me. I can't tell it!"

With a deep, acute pain, Fitz felt how involuntarily the child shrunk from him, and felt, too, how little he could wonder at this, or blame him for it.

"Very well, laddie," he said, with quiet sadness; "I will not ask you to tell me what you saw, because, of course, I know; and I know who saw it as well as you. Let us talk of something else, shall we? Let us think of other things—prepare for other things. Run, laddie, and fetch me all the treasures that you have; for we must take them with us."

Without even asking his favorite question, "Why?" the boy went slowly upstairs, returning presently with a small wooden box in his hands.

"Here they are, dad; do you want them?" he asked, holding the box tightly.

"Not to keep," the artist answered; "only to see what you have got—what you have to cherish when we leave behind us—"

He checked himself, with a smile into the child's inquisitive face.

"Now, you can hold the box. Keep it safe, and I will make discoveries. All right. Open, Sesame!"

Fitz turned over the trifles gently, one by one, smiling a little sadly to see how valueless they were. Not that he told the child this; on the contrary, he handled the things with tenderness, and now and then exclaimed, admiringly,

"There's the jew's-harp; how well I remember buying that! And here's the old baby-rattle; and here's— Ah!"

The cry was slow and full of thought; only that one short word, and Fitz Spendir's eyes were keenly and intently bent on a small piece of gilded jewelry which he held between his fingers—a piece of jewelry, at least, that had been gilded once, but was now in its unmistakably brass under-suit. Breathing quickly, Fitz signed Jet away with the box, and opened the locket.

"I—knew it," he muttered. "I wonder why I felt so certain of it all in a moment. Ah, what a good thing *this* is for my boy! I need not take

him now. *He* will have a home. I remember the story so well! I wonder whether I should have remembered every word of it as I do, if any one else had told it to me? God bless her! I think I never could forget any of her bright, kind, thoughtful words, even if I had been used to such of late. Jet," he added, aloud, "don't look so astonished, dear lad. Come here and see this. Take it up to the lamp, and describe it to me."

"It is a locket, father," the boy said, in his gentle, practical way, wondering why he must look at it alone there; "I know all about it without looking. There's hair in it on both sides, and names; under one hair there's 'Jessie' written, and under the other there's 'Dorcas.' That's all. And it was mother's, you know, and she told me to keep it. Are you going to do any thing to it, dad?"

"No," replied Fitz, gently. "Take it in your own care, laddie. Now, let us tell stories to each other, like old times."

"Yes," faltered Jet, without the prompt gladness with which in those old times he had always received the idea.

"Shall we make up the fire first?" asked Fitz, rising, and moving toward it with an attempt at his old ease, which failed most pitifully. "What do you think, old fellow? Wouldn't a few sticks brighten it up quickest? I'll light you to fetch them, for we've no time to lose."

"Why no time to lose?" inquired Jet curiously, even suspiciously. "What have we got to do, dad?"

"Many things," laughed Fitz; but the boy, watching him as he lighted the candle in his hand, saw no smile in his eyes. He piled the sticks on the little grate while Jet stood by, open-mouthed.

"Why, dad," he ejaculated at last, when his astonishment found words, "you'll burn enough for a whole week—you'll burn 'em all! We can't light the fire to-morrow."

"No," replied the artist, slowly, his face hidden as the crackling flames leaped about him, "not to-morrow."

"There, dad, leave off," whined Jet, growing fretful because he felt he could not understand things to-night.

"All right, laddie," assented Fitz, taking his own seat in the cheerful fire-light. "Come, are you too big to sit on my knee to-night?"

But the boy, ignoring the invitation, drew another chair up for himself, and took his seat silently and demurely. Fitz Spendir, in his sorrow and heart-loneliness, felt this keenly; but no glance or word told of the pain it gave him. His eyes, warm and pitiful as the boy had ever known them, turned to him as he drew the two chairs close together; his words, genial as the boy had ever known them too, were only these:

"Now, laddie, it's my turn first, I suppose. I'm ready. You must listen all the time, because—because I want you to tell the very same story afterward."

"The same one, dad—why?"

Fitz gently stroked the little face upturned in its surprise. It seemed to-night as if the strong, self-concentrated man longed and craved even for the love and sympathy of the timid, cautious child.

"You will know some time, little one. Never mind any reasons for any thing to-night. Forget that favorite word of yours, 'why,' and listen to me, just as you listen to 'The Arabian Nights,' and 'Robinson Crusoe.'"

The wood fire crackled and blazed, and faded and blazed again; and in its fluctuating light they sat, the man's voice low and earnest as he told the little story which the boy was to tell afterward, and to which he listened so breathlessly.

"That's the end," Fitz said, presently. "Now, listen a little longer. Presently—presently," he repeated sadly, for the word had to him the sorrow which belongs to the last time, "you will go in next door, and tell this story to Mrs. Cheere; and then stay to see what she thinks of it. But I don't want you to forget a single word of it; so now tell it to me—just as if I were Mrs. Dorcas herself. Now, then, for the rehearsal."

No question passed the boy's lips. The man's deep, quiet earnestness was infectious, and Jet (his head bent in the fire-light, and his thin fingers tight upon the locket) spoke with his gentle, old-fashioned gravity.

"I shall go in and show this to Mrs. Cheere, and I shall say that there was once a little girl who was stolen from her home in Churchill, and from her mother, and she had this upon her neck, and she kept it always till she died. And she was taken a long way off, and sold to a circus—she thought she was sold, but wasn't sure—and she used to ride and things, and she got very tired of it, and was very unhappy. And so one day she fell down from a high horse, and was hurt, and somebody who was a dress-maker took her home and cured her, and she staid with her, and was quite happy till she was grown up; and she always kept the locket, but couldn't ever find her mother or her old home, because she couldn't remember either of them, except like a far-away sort of dream. And so one day a gentleman said he was very fond of her, and made her marry him, and go away from every body that had loved her, and always been good to her, and taken care of her; and made her live in a house in a lonely part of London, with nobody but him; and soon he got to stay away from her all day, and then he got to stay away all night, and then he got to stay away altogether; and he left her alone and poor, and she had only her little boy (but he didn't know it, 'cos he was only a baby), and then—and then— How am I to say this, dad?"

"As you like, dear laddie."

"And then," resumed the boy, with still the gravity in his eyes and voice, "somebody who had known her cruel husband, and had know that dress-maker who'd loved her, tried and tried to find her out and help her. But he couldn't have time, because he was sent a long way off for eight years. But when half the time was over he came back, and found her out really, just as she was growing more and more dying; and the little boy was with her, and nobody else; and this gentleman staid and helped her as much as he could, only he was as poor as he could be. And when she was dead, he took the little boy with him, and they've lived together ever since. And the locket—"

"Wait, laddie, where is the end? Tell it properly."

"And," the boy said, rising and standing before the artist's chair, "I should say, Mrs. Cheere, the little girl who was stolen was your little girl, and the gentleman who married her, and was so

cruel, was Mr. Jelfrey, and the little boy was me, and the gentleman who was with mother, and knows all about her, and where her grave is—for he chose it—and who has had me with him ever since, is—how shall I call you, father?"

"Not *father* any more, dear lad, I fear," the artist said, bending his dark face upon the little pale, upraised one, "but just what you think of at the moment. The right word is sure to come then from those tender little lips. I can leave it all to you. Now, are you ready to go, and have you the locket?"

"But," argued Jet, "Mrs. Cheere is out now, dad. She was having tea with the housekeeper at The Anchorage when we were there, and she had met Miss Castillain, and had heard—and she came up to Mrs. Esdaile, and—oh! dad—"

The sobs, which had been withheld all the evening, broke out here unrestrainedly at some sudden recollection.

"And she said, I suppose," the artist put in, "that she had heard what had happened, and had been expecting it—and, what else?"

"No; she said," sobbed the child, "that she heard you say you wouldn't think it any sin to kill Mr. Jelfrey. She heard it through the wall, and she'd been frightened ever since, she said; and she said—"

"What?"

"That if ever we deserved a deluge it's now, when such crimes—such crimes, she said, were committed by people that lived under the same roof with innocent people. Oh! dad, I don't want to go to *her!*"

"But, dear," the artist said, quite gently—though the thought bitterly forced its way that it should be *she* whose words could condemn him, and that this child should be the one to tell it—"she will be quite different to you when she has heard that story you are going to tell her. She is your grandmother, you know, and she will love you at once, for her 'little girl's' sake, and very soon for your own. Now put supper, laddie—let's have it together to-night (if there is any) before you go."

With just the deft quietness which belonged to him, the child laid the cloth on the round table; but there was nothing to put upon it then but one small, cold mutton-chop.

"You said this morning that we would call, as we came home, and buy something, dad," the boy said, looking ruefully at his neat but scant preparation.

"Yes, dear; but, strange to say, we're quite at a loss in the morning to know what the evening will bring forth. That's quite enough."

"Then come, please," Jet urged, quietly placing a chair for Fitz.

"I will come and sit down," he said, gently, his dark, sad face brightening involuntarily as Jet, now of his own accord, brought the chairs close up together, "but I've no appetite yet. It's rather early for a grown-up man's supper, isn't it? I hope you're hungry, though, laddie. The pleasantest sight I can have will be to see you eat this chop. Now, dear: 'For what we are going to receive, O Lord, make us thankful. Amen.'"

"But, dad," argued Jet, opening his eyes and dropping his folded hands, as he wonderingly looked up into the artist's face, "if you aren't going to receive any supper, why do you say 'we?'"

"There may be other things coming to us, laddie, besides supper," Fitz answered. "Never mind that, though. Now, here's the crust. You always liked the crust of a loaf, didn't you?"

He watched the boy, who eat slowly and without any relish; and then, when the meal was over, he drew him for a few moments close within his arms, and hid his face upon the little head.

There was an utter silence between them for those few moments—a silence which the boy could only understand completely when, a man himself, he could still distinctly recall this wretched night. Then Fitz opened the back door of Mrs. Cheere's cottage with his own key, for the bolt had not been drawn, and the child went in alone; dressed, as he had been all day, in his best clothes, and holding safely between both hands the little gilded locket. And Fitz watched him to the last minute, his eyes dim, but his lips set firmly as they had not been before since Sir Neil Athelston had left him.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

FITZ SPENDIR'S JUDGE.

One glance the artist gave round his own room—a brief, cynical, comprehensive glance; then, avoiding touching one single thing which it contained, he unfastened again the door in the back of the cottage, which opened close upon the field-path to the valley; and this path he traversed in rapid silence, until he came close upon that tarn in the hollow.

Far from shunning or avoiding it, he walked up to the brink, and (in the gloom that was awful as deep darkness) stood gazing along the surface, his eyes still dim, his lips still stern and rigid. Then once more he resumed his rapid flight, and never paused again until he reached a village station some four miles from Churchill.

The rain was falling now continuously, and Fitz Spendir's coat and hat were soaked; but he avoided the booking-office and the covered part of the station, and walked slowly to and fro upon the unsheltered platform. How long would it be before the London train came? Would there be time for him to be stopped? Even if the train were punctual, there was still half an hour to wait. He had better have lingered longer, he thought, in that heavy gloom among the hills.

Half an hour! He would walk backward and forward just one hundred times—surely that would bring the hour near! He walked as slowly as he could, the beating rain unheeded, and then he glanced through the office-window at the station clock. A quarter of an hour nearer! One hundred times more. Would the pursuing feet have reached him then, and ended it all? Or would the train be in time? The second hundred were finished; and then, Fitz, breathing rather hard and fast, but with no attempt at concealing his face, entered the ticket-office, and bought a second-class ticket to London.

"You've just escaped a disappointment, sir," the station-master observed. "It's only since this month began that the train has stopped here; last month you couldn't have gone."

Fitz smiled as he pocketed his ticket.

"I'm lucky, then," he said, coolly; and the man little guessed what meaning the words bore.

"Is the train generally pretty punctual?" he inquired.

"Always pretty punctual, sir," was the answer. "There's a goods train to run through first, and then it generally follows as punctual as may be."

"Thanks."

Fitz had now turned to leave the office; but another passenger, muffled up and laden, was entering, and so he had to stand a minute until the door-way was free again. Standing so—still never hiding his face, but looking out clearly on every thing about him—his eyes fell upon certain printed words that hung upon the wall, and they rested there upon one line, which seemed to stand alone amidst the other lines, clearer, plainer, more distinct:

"*He that judgeth me is the Lord.*"

Out on the platform once more, standing away from the light, in the drenching rain; and looking eagerly into the distant darkness for the lamps, these words repeated themselves to Fitz again and again.

At last the glaring red eyes met his watching ones, and an engine dashed up to him; past him; away into the darkness behind; and the goods train had left the station clear for the one for which he so breathlessly waited.

"*He that judgeth me is the Lord.*"

In the very blackness that encircled him, the words shone out; not in letters of light or of fire, only just as he had seen them, black letters on the white paper; simple, forcible, truthful, but with no outward reason to make them so, the force, the truth, and the simplicity lying in the words themselves.

Would the train be in time, or would the pursuing footsteps—? Ah, no, not too late, for here it came; the fiery eyes steadily, swiftly rolling toward him, bringing rescue.

Fitz drew back from the edge of the platform, and moved down again toward the lighted part of the station. It was coming now, close behind him. The whistle had died away in the silence, and the engine's pace was slow and deliberate; yet even now, with escape so close at hand, Fitz saw those words more plainly than aught else:

"*He that judgeth me is the Lord.*"

Was he whispering them to himself, or could other voices—

"Almost exact to time, you see, sir," said the porter, opening a carriage-door near Fitz, as the train stopped. "All right here, sir. "It's wet enough standing where you've been."

The carriage-door stood wide open; the other passenger had taken his seat; the engine was getting up its steam again. Beyond lay inscrutable darkness; and, beyond that, safety in the crowd and labyrinth of London. The pursuing footsteps had not been in time. Escape and rescue were here awaiting him. Why should those words delay him?

The man held the door, and waited. Fitz took out a shilling, and put it quietly into his hand. He, at any rate, had helped him, and was willing unconsciously to help him until the fear of detection was passed—perhaps forever. Yet could he fly from judgment if He that judged him was the *Lord?*

"Quick, sir, please."

And still Fitz hesitated; haunted by the echo of those words at which this man had gazed all day perhaps, seeing no meaning in them.

"Please be quick, sir; there's no cause to stop."

The answer was low and rapid—spoken in an intense and bitter struggle.

"Shut the door; I'm not going."

The London train whirled away into the blackness of the night landscape. The porter stood at the station gate, his lantern raised to see the last of the would-be passenger, who "must surely be mad to have bought a ticket, and been as if he was going to London, till the very last moment, and then turn all at once so suddenly."

And the man he judged so, tired and drenched, took his way, in the rain and darkness, back across the hills, to his own deserted home, there to await the death to which he knew he might be doomed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"JUST SUCH AS HE."

When Fitz Spendir re-entered his cottage, he found the lamp burning, and Colonel Stuart standing beside the fireless grate, evidently awaiting him.

His first sensation was one of extreme pleasure, and his face showed it; but when the words he would have uttered, in this pleasure, rose to his lips, he mistrusted himself, and so the words that passed them had a different meaning and a different tone.

"I expected the police here, Colonel Stuart."

"Never mind the police, Spendir, for these few minutes. I waited, feeling sure you would return. I have been anxious all the evening to come and speak with you, but I could not leave High Athelston before. They are worried and anxious about the absence of Miss Chester. Poor Lady Athelston has been in hysterics, and Miss Marjorie Castillain has had much trouble with her. Sir Neil has gone—to seek Miss Chester, as I fear."

Not a word could Fitz Spendir say in reply to this speech, so kindly spoken.

"I wanted to see you," the colonel added, "that I might tell you how willingly every thing in our power will be done for you. You may rest assured of that, Spendir."

Fitz smiled—a smile that might either have been incredulous or hopeless.

"I promise you," the colonel repeated, earnestly.

"You would not—you *could* not, if you knew," Fitz said. . . . . .

"I would—I shall, *because* I know," was the prompt, gentle answer.

"How, Colonel Stuart?" inquired the artist, gazing into his face with surprise.

"It would be a long story, if I were to tell you exactly how," returned the colonel. "Even your sister—though she does not guess it—could understand and believe it more readily than you will, because she may remember whom her old pupil, Clara Esdaile, married. You were away at the time, so would hardly know that for one brief year she was my wife. Did you never make

inquiries about my sister when you heard her name—little Jack's name, too?"

"I knew," Fitz said, in a low, hesitating voice, "I knew that it was Mrs. Esdaile's husband who—who prosecuted for his father five years ago."

"Yes," put in the colonel, in his quiet, kindly way, "old Mr. Esdaile's only son. He is in Africa now, or he would have recognized you; his wife had never seen you, so, of course, could not do so. But Clara had known you so well, and, above all, loved your sister so very dearly, that she never believed in your guilt. Is it strange, therefore, that I should have grown to believe what my wife believed, until now the belief is, in reality, a *consciousness* of your innocence? She used to talk to me of your sister Magdalen, and, indeed, of you, until I seemed to know you both. Still, it was only gradually that I recognized you. I had a suspicion even at first; then the suspicion dawned into conviction. Even when Miss Chester came with me here, only a day or two after her arrival in Highshire, I began to fancy what also became a certainty to me afterward. Spendir, have I any need to tell you that this discovery was never breathed to any one but my own sister, and that to her it had grown to be, even then, more than a suspicion? And believe this: day by day, as our knowledge of you grew, it only became more impossible for us to feel that the verdict uttered against you nearly five years ago could have been a just one; and, day by day, as our knowledge of your sister grew, Clara's judgment of her came to be *our* judgment, and the friendship that we were both willing to give her, for Clara's sake, was won from us for her own. Now, Spendir, you will believe that nothing which we *can* do for you will be left undone."

"You are—you always have been—very kind, Colonel Stuart," returned Fitz, his face very still and thoughtful, as it had been all through the colonel's speech; "but—if I understand the fact aright, for even yet it is all vague and unreal to me—it is better for me not to hope. Acquittal will be impossible for me when that former trial of mine is known. But I may hope now for Magdalen; I shall never feel again, after your generous words, that she is so utterly alone and forsaken. Even if I can not thank you for your unexampled goodness to myself, I can thank you for that which you have shown to her. But," he added, rather hurriedly, "I can not let you sit with me to-night, Colonel Stuart, without telling you by what a mere chance you found me here. You waited, you say, confident that I should return; that confidence, at any rate, I have not deserved, for I—had not intended to be here awaiting my fate."

And then Fitz Spendir, in that low, unhurried tone which grows natural to those who live much alone, told of his escape as far as the village station, of the few words he had read there, and of how strangely and deeply those words had sunk into his heart, until it grew impossible to him to follow his original design.

Colonel Stuart sat opposite, listening in silence; his eyes full of a deep sympathy, but never once raised to the artist's face.

When the short, sad story was over, he stretched out his hand to Fitz. He was a cool, middle-aged soldier, yet he would not trust himself to speak just then. For an instant Fitz hesitated, looking wistfully at the outstretched hand.

"I can not resist," he said then, with his low, rich laugh. "It may be the last, as it has been the first, which has sought mine, for—for most of a life-time, counting as time *ought* to be counted. Colonel Stuart, you are not one to regret that you have taken in yours even the stained hand of a murderer?"

"Hush, Spendir!" put in the colonel, in real distress; "that word need not be uttered between us. This would never have occurred if you had known of the old shaft beneath the water."

"No, never; but the deed is done," interposed Fitz. "No ignorance of mine takes from it the horrors of guilt. Possibly at the trial, as you kindly think, they may call it by another name, but it makes no difference to me. I have taken his life—so those who saw us say—that is enough. It is a long thought, and will last me a long time. What else have I to think of, now that my life has stopped? A black curtain has fallen between me and the future; what have I but the past to look at—the near past, and the long past? Though, God knows, there's nothing cheerful there! Guilt there, too—guilt always; and its punishment."

"Not your own guilt," put in the officer, earnestly.

"But what difference has that made?" was the answer, spoken in a passion, which was as short-lived as it was strong and ironical. "What difference has that ever made? There followed the punishment, the isolation, the degradation. Could it have been more, if I had done the deed in the sight of man and God? I've often and often since then *wanted* to commit just such a sin. You look incredulous—in your spotless, unsuspected life, you can no more imagine such feelings than you can imagine the treatment which gives birth to them—yet these vile thoughts have grown horribly familiar to me. I have *wanted* to commit the real sin, because I had borne, and was bearing, its punishment, and because all my life was marred for any good. I knew no worse consequences could have followed the real crime. There were years and years of labor to look forward to, and there was the ban upon my name, which could never be taken away again. Could any thing have added punishment to these? My whole prospect of ever living honored or loved—loved! think of love in such a life as mine!—among my fellow-men, was shattered to atoms. What did it matter where those atoms drifted to? No; *you* can never fancy how easy the real guilt often seemed to me."

"Yes, I can understand," rejoined the colonel; "and I can understand the Loving-kindness which withheld your hand through that time. However black a curtain hides the future from you, Spendir, it can not hide the heaven above."

"But I never thought of that—sometimes I did not even believe it," returned Fitz, the passion of his quick tones softening a little. "It is harder still to think of it now. Where is the mercy that—"

"Spendir," interrupted the colonel, easily and genially turning aside the cynical, unhealthy thoughts which he felt were but natural just now, from this man whose strong sense of justice battled so fiercely with that simple, anxious faith with which he tried to grope through the darkness of his own thoughts, "you have been work-

ing hard and saving carefully through this summer; am I right in my idea of your reason? Are you trying to accumulate that sum which—for which the check was drawn in your name?"

"I *was* trying," returned the young man, pushing the hair from his dark face, with a gesture of such utter weariness and hopelessness that the colonel felt his lips shake as he read in it many unspoken words—"I was trying; but that is over now, like every thing else. What a fool I must have been to have begun such a work with any hope at all! Yet I did. I can laugh now to find how strong and deathless hope must be within a man for it ever to have misled *me*. I did work for that, late and early, happily and hopefully—ay, laughable as it sounds. No work seemed too hard or too heavy for that end. I have saved; but a thousand pounds takes a long, long time to accumulate by the hands of one man, who has no particular talent, and no friends. If my old means of livelihood had not failed me in my need, the task would have been comparatively easy to me. But, as I told you months ago, my voice failed me for singing in public; what wonder that it did, in that time of degradation?"

"Don't let us speak of that time," said the colonel, gently. "I hope you understand that not one farthing of that money will either Adelaide or her husband take; and do you for a moment dream that I would take Clara's share from one who never robbed her of a half-penny? Don't speak of that time again. Perhaps it need not be recalled at all. Perhaps no one will know."

"Not know that I am a ticket-of-leave man! Why, that will be the first thing brought forward at my trial, and will damn me instantly. A ticket-of-leave man—a returned convict! Think of it. Say it over to yourself, and imagine the weight of those few words in a court of justice. You should have heard the horror and rage of my neighbor here, when she fancied a ticket-of-leave man came to our doors to ask for a crust, only to-day. A helpless, crippled old idiot he was; but what did that matter? He was capable of any thing savage or mean or horrible, because he only *might* be a convict with a ticket of leave. He was to be avoided and scouted and spit at, because he only *might* be this horrible thing. Perhaps he was—perhaps he wasn't. What did it matter? The consequences, as far as she went, were all one to him; as the consequences will be all one to me. I didn't care whether he was or not; I'm used to them. I've known them harmless and quiet—actually as if they hadn't done the wrong. I've known them so like men that hadn't been debased, that you wouldn't have discovered them if the irons had been taken away; and I've known them fiends incarnate."

"But the story of these old years may be hushed up," put in Colonel Stuart, gently. "We all have a little power in the county; Sir Neil Athelston has much."

It was because he knew this so well that Fitz Spendir answered, with such quick resentment,

"I don't care to benefit by his unlimited power. *Your* help and sympathy, but—" he added, interrupting himself as if the subject hurt him keenly, "why, in Heaven's name, should help be sought for me? I did that deed to-night. Even if no one had been present to swear I did it, the stain upon my name would condemn me."

"There will be evidence in your favor, too," put in Colonel Stuart.

"Not to weigh for much, even if *you* win it for me (for who else would?). Not to weigh for much against that other evidence. Why, that of my next-door neighbor alone should hang me. Colonel Stuart," he added, laughing his short laugh of nervous strength and hopelessness, "is not it easy to love your neighbor as yourself?"

"How would her evidence injure you, Spendir?"

Then Fitz repeated what Jet had heard her tell Mrs. Esdaile while he was at The Anchorage, and vexed indeed did the colonel look as he listened.

"It would not signify if it stopped there," he muttered, "but she may have repeated the same thing to others. It may have spread all over the town by this time. I would have done any thing to prevent this."

"Don't think of it more, Colonel Stuart," said Fitz, with a change to great gentleness in his voice, "and don't even try to help me, for you must see what a failure any effort would be. I am ready for my trial, ready even for the verdict, as Heaven knows I could not have been in that other trial. But, oh! if you can help my sister," he added, with intense earnestness, "and *will* do it, I shall be grateful always. If I only knew now that she was safe, every thing else would seem almost easy to bear."

"You have no idea where she is, then?"

"Indeed, no. I have not seen her since this morning, when she promised to come here again at dusk. Lady Athelston was out for the day, she said, and her time was her own."

"And she evidently came," said the colonel; "and, as you were away, she followed you to the valley. From the tarn she was lost sight of. I was glad, Spendir, truly glad, for I had been in real fear lest we should find her at High Athelston. She has acted with the deepest wisdom—consciously or unconsciously."

"Thank God!" murmured Fitz.

"Don't be anxious about her," continued Colonel Stuart, kindly. "If she does return, you may rely upon my gladly helping and cheering her in every way I have the power to do. Depend on this through all, Spendir."

"She can hardly miss *my* protection," said Fitz, sadly; "what good has it ever been to her? Yet how differently we had planned—and dreamed of—her life and mine!"

"And, besides my ready, willing help, always at her service," the colonel continued, a little huskily, "you may depend on Miss Castillain's—Miss Marjorie Castillain's. Her deepest sympathy is with your sister—and with you."

"Did she say it?" inquired the young man, his beautiful eyes taking their old warmth, and the dusky color rising in his cheeks.

"Indeed she did," replied the colonel, looking away from his companion, and speaking with a new and great pity in his tones. "I will tell you her own words, Spendir—of course I will, for she spoke them for you; I am only her messenger. 'Tell him,' she said, 'that you have offered to tell me his story, but that I will not listen until he says that he *wishes* me to hear it. Tell him that, not knowing one single word of it, I trust him as implicitly as I trust Lina; and as I *shall* trust her all through her absence. Tell him

I shall never cease trying to help him as far as my little power goes, and shall hope to be his friend, and his sister's friend, all my life. Tell him I never shall think of him except as I've thought of him all through this summer, while I've seen him working always hard and earnestly among us, always brave through ridicule, and uncomplaining through privation. Tell him I shall never rest until I know Lina Chester to be happy and safe; and this because she has, by her own real goodness, won my love, and I can not take it back ever, or let it lie idle and unhelpful. Tell him all this, while I don't know his story or hers, yet while I trust and respect them both entirely. And tell him I never can think of Eustace Jelfrey except as the wicked man I know him—I, best of all, though he can not understand that—and that I do not think him dead.' That was her message, Spendir, and I have remembered every word."

Fitz was standing against the chimney-piece, his face hidden, his chest heaving quickly. Without looking up, the colonel spoke on, following his own thoughts.

"We all know Eustace Jelfrey now too well," he said, "to doubt his power of dissembling; but I think Miss Castillain has cause to know him best, except, of course, yourself and your sister."

"Colonel Stuart," said Fitz, turning slowly, and speaking with intense, suppressed emotion, "will you tell Miss Marjorie our story—Magdalen's and mine—and will you wait and listen to one chapter which I have never spoken of until this evening, when I told it to Sir Neil Athelston?"

Quietly now, the young man related the story which had been told in heat and scorn a few hours before. And the colonel answered not one word—not one single word—but he just laid his hand on that of the nameless artist, the returned convict, the homicide; and grasped it so closely and tightly that Fitz Spendir knew this meant far more than a good-bye.

The two men walked down the garden together, and parted at the gate. Then Fitz stood there a few minutes, alone in the darkness and the silence, for the storm which had risen three hours before among the hills had lulled. Presently that silence was broken by voices and footsteps. They were coming, then, at last; and Fitz was conscious of a feeling almost of relief, until there broke upon his ear the raised, cold voice of Dorcas Cheere.

"Yes, that's the cottage; next to mine, more's the shame and pity"—these were the words he heard—"and it's a good thing that you've come to take him to-night; I should have been frightened enough to be near him through another night and darkness. Goodness knows what he mightn't have done; for a man that can kill one can kill another."

The young man smiled oddly as he listened; yet the words fell far more heavily upon his ear than did the rough salute of the men whose business it was to take him to his long imprisonment.

"To think I should have lived close to such danger all these months!" muttered Dorcas, lingering to listen, and to enjoy the suggestive clinking of the handcuffs. "It must have been just such as he that took my little girl."

The other words, if there were any, were lost to Fitz as the men led him away; but these kept repeating themselves again and again to him,

"Just such as he—"

And as he walked away, slowly and silently in the darkness, Dorcas passed on into her cottage, where the patient child sat waiting to tell her the story of his little life.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SEARCH FOR LINA.

Miss Castillain lounged before the drawing-room fire at Hawkedale, with the second volume of a new novel in her hand. But though she was highly interested in the fate of the golden-haired and angelic heroine therein portrayed, she went but slowly through the volume; because whenever she heard the sound of the hall-bell vibrating through the silent old house, she slipped it under the cushion of the couch, and leaned back, with her white hands lying on the masses of bright wools which were scattered in picturesque confusion on the rich folds of her black silk dress.

No one, except the servants (who most of them hated her with a pious hatred), ever ventured to assert that Miss Castillain was wearing mourning for Mr. Jelfrey; but certain it is that since Fitz Spendir had been pronounced guilty of manslaughter at the magisterial inquiry at Churchill, she had worn only this one black dress ("though she wouldn't, if it wasn't a handsome and becoming one," as her maid declared, with a toss of her head). And, indeed, if abjuring all colors constitutes wearing mourning, Louisa Castillain did mourn for the man whom she delighted to fancy she had loved with an undying love. And beyond the black dress, she wore a sorrowful resignation on her face, a melancholy droop in her light-blue eyes, and a graceful inertness in her whole attitude; wore them, at least, to all who called at Hawkedale in those days (and they were many, for the curiosity and sympathy of Highshire had been roused by that scene at the mountain tarn); and, of course, no one saw the novel under the sofa-pillow, or heard, either, the sharp words in the store-room, or the gossip in the dressing-room.

But there are few of us who could bear the examination of our skeleton-closet by our morning callers; so we will let Louisa practice with impunity her little harmless fictions.

This time, however, the book was put away unnecessarily, and the effect of the pretty hands among the brilliant skeins was wasted; for when the door opened it was only to admit Marjorie, although the step was so different from the light step which belonged to her that even Louisa had not recognized it.

"Riding again!" she said, sneering a little as she surreptitiously drew the novel from its hiding-place. "What induces you to ride forever?"

"What else is there to do?"

Marjorie asked the question with an intense listlessness, as she stood opposite her sister. Her habit (dropped as if her hands were tired of it) lay in thick folds upon the rug, her whip was thrown upon the easy-chair behind her, her hands were locked upon the carved old chimney-piece, and her eyes were fixed upon the fire.

"What else is there to do!" echoed Louisa; "why, plenty of things, I should think, for a girl like you. You have not been to the school for this whole fortnight. Mr. Jorden will be astonished at our neglect, and *I* can not be expected to—to take an interest in those things again yet."

"No," replied Marjorie, tersely; "don't try. Let it drop."

"But it is not right to let these things drop," put in the elder sister, resignedly. "I never should, under ordinary circumstances."

"I shall be very glad when you feel inclined to do them again, Louie," Marjorie said, almost sadly, "and to take pleasure in them. But please don't ask me. I don't feel it's of any use to do 'these things,' as you say, unless one feels sure they are benefiting either one's self or others. I know I should not benefit any one now; not myself, for I should be chafing sorely all the time I taught; not the children, for I should fail in giving them the easiest lesson of all. I could not even tell them what p-a-t-i-e-n-c-e spells."

"And so you find your time pass more profitably, randomly riding about the country alone, or joining Neil at some dismal place among the hills? Riding together as you used to do is a different thing from this."

"Very different," assented Marjorie, without raising her eyes.

"And, really," Miss Castillain added, with acrimony, "I wonder you can act as you do, when you know how the Highshire people talk."

"What sort of people?" inquired Marjorie, listlessly.

"And I doubly wonder," continued her sister, unheeding the remark, "how you can persist in it, when you must see what a continual insult to you was Neil's behavior to Miss Chester while she lived with his mother, and what a double insult now is his assiduity in searching for her himself, setting every tongue busy with your name. As if it were not enough," lamented Louisa, with a dismal relish, "for *me* to be the subject of gossip and pity!"

Marjorie's lips curled a little, but still her eyes were not lifted.

"Why don't you take off your habit before you come in here?" inquired Louisa. "Are you going to do so at all?"

"Presently. Louie, has Colonel Stuart been here to-day?"

"No. Why?"

"Because he said he hoped to come. If I thought he had been prevented," mused Marjorie, "I would ride on to The Anchorage before I take off my habit."

"Well, I'm sure," ejaculated Louisa, "I wouldn't ride after *him* as well as after Neil, if I were you, Marjorie; you do nothing else all day."

"One thing more," said Marjorie; "I count the days as they crawl on, and long most vainly for the months to fly till they bring March."

"And may I ask why?" drawled Louisa, scornfully, though she knew perfectly well.

"Yes, you may ask if you like," returned Marjorie, simply; "but, as you know, I shall not answer."

"Polite; but I would advise you not to let every body see how interested you are in that man's trial."

"December, January, February, March—nearly four months," counted Marjorie. "I tell them over to myself so often that they seem to grow more instead of less."

"I, too, wish the trial were over," put in Louisa, with a long-drawn sigh. "It will be a very trying scene for me—very trying, indeed."

Marjorie glanced long and questioningly at her sister as these words were uttered; but when she read the vindictiveness which dictated them, the listless quietness on her face vanished suddenly.

"If that busy, restless, selfish Neil finds—finds Miss Chester before the trial," she said, her clear young voice full of passionate anger, "I will—I will—"

"Will what?" sneered the sister. "Will never speak to him again, were you going to say? Suppose he does not value that threat quite so much as you may fancy?"

"Be quiet!" cried Marjorie, with a quick stamp of her foot. "Even Neil, in this cruel, selfish pursuit of his, is not so contemptible as you are. He *wants* to be kind to her, only he does not know the wisest way, and loves himself much better than he loves her. But you—you think of no one but yourself, no one; and all *your* grief is only cruelty dressed in hypocritical mourning. There, I knew I should not be able to help saying it some day soon—and now it is said."

"Have you quite finished?" questioned Louisa, with slow scorn in her tone, and raising her light eyebrows languidly. "Your vulgarity, with all your care, still peeps out at times, and I am getting hopeless of ever seeing you different."

"Will you never think my words are real and earnest?" panted the younger girl. "You always treat me as if I were a baby or an idiot. If I am vexed, you enjoy my vexation; if I am glad, you sneer at my happiness; if I am sad, you laugh at my silence. Oh, I am so tired of it!"

The cry rushed up from an overburdened heart, and though Louisa's ears—dull and selfish ever—distinguished none of its yearning pathos, she uttered her next words a little more gently.

"It is most strange to see Neil eager in this chase: he is so lazy always, so afraid of exertion, so indifferent to other people's troubles."

"I watch him in astonishment," said Marjorie, presently, too thoroughly engrossed with other thoughts to resent any thing her sister had said — "an astonishment that now and then borders on admiration, for, under all his lazy indifference, there actually seems to throb a real passionate power and earnestness."

"I'm sorry it is there, if it is to be directed so," said Louisa, with a provoking leisureliness.

A quick look Marjorie gave into the sharp, fair face.

"I am very sorry it is directed *so*," she said, truthfully; "but I don't suppose our reasons are quite the same."

"Of course," ruminated Miss Castillain, complacently, "the girl is sure to be found before the assizes. Still her evidence, though it would be satisfactory to have it, is not necessary. We three are quite enough to have seen poor Eustace murdered."

"Don't cry, Louisa," remarked her sister,

dryly, seeing Louisa putting her handkerchief to her eyes at the mention of Mr. Jelfrey by his Christian name (a luxury of speech which she had adopted with her black dress). "You needn't cry; I don't suppose he is dead at all."

"Marjorie!" exclaimed Miss Castillain, as she had many times before exclaimed at this coolly pronounced idea, "how can you hurt and insult me as you do? Do you suppose that I was blind or mad that evening?"

"I don't say he did not fall into the pool," put in Marjorie, gently; "only I say I believe he is not dead."

"You only insist on it to aggravate me," whined Louisa; "and you didn't let me finish what I was going to say. Do you suppose that, if he were alive, he would not be here?—that he would not have come to me?"

"I can not tell," replied the younger girl, with a gleam of her old humor, "because I never did and never shall understand any one of his inscrutable designs. Did *you* ever quite understand him?"

The scarlet mounted to the very roots of Miss Castillain's fair, frizzled hair as she met her sister's eyes—the eyes that were so brightly honest in their questioning—and she answered as she would not have done if she had been at her ease,

"It is not many girls who would side with the murderer of their sister's lover."

"It is astonishing," said Marjorie, quietly turning aside the remark, "to see how greatly Lady Athelston misses Miss Chester."

"Perhaps it is for his mother's sake, then, that Neil is so indefatigable in his search," proposed Louisa, spitefully.

"Perhaps so; and it is just as astonishing to see how Colonel Stuart takes this affair to heart. He has been to the jail—he has been to see Mr. Spendir again and again, and he tries— Louie," she added, checking herself with a sudden tightening of her lips, "you heard that strange story which Neil told us the other night about Mr. Spendir calling himself an Athelston?"

"Ridiculous!" snapped Miss Castillain; "yes, I heard, of course, and I didn't wonder at his laughing over it as such an absurdity. I only wonder at the man's volunteering to cast a slur on his own birth just now, and at Neil's condescending to repeat such rubbish, even to us."

"I think," said Marjorie, thoughtfully, "that Neil told us as a piece of diplomacy for which I should hardly have given him credit. He fancied Mr. Spendir would tell it all to the magistrates, and he wished us to hear his own ironical version of it first; that we might be prepared to look upon it only as absurd and idiotic, and a sign of Mr. Spendir's crowning degradation—as he represented it."

"Absurd and idiotic and degrading indeed; I should think so!" was the prompt reply. "And I believe Colonel Stuart has heard it too. Why, I should think this man did it to prepare the way for a plea of insanity in his defense. He is cunning enough to have invented it for that purpose."

"Of course it will be looked into," mused Marjorie.

"Looked into! Surely no one would condescend to look into any thing so preposterous."

"Suppose it turns out that he is the real barquet," Marjorie went on, with a great thoughtfulness in her voice, and a dancing light in her eyes; "what a contrast to the present one—or, I ought to say, in that case, what a contrast to the presumptive one!"

"Rather a contrast to the real one, indeed," sneered Miss Castillain. "You would hardly have jumped so readily then at the prospect of being Lady Athelston?"

"Did I jump at the prospect of being Lady Athelston?" questioned Marjorie, very slowly; "then I am sure I should have leaped— What a sneer, Louie! I really dare not finish my sentence."

"What makes you think Colonel Stuart is coming here this afternoon?" asked Louisa, beginning to think it would be safest to put her book away for good.

"Because he told me, this morning at the post-office, that he wished to see papa."

"And did you ask him to call?"

"No. I only said I had not believed before that any one ever really wished to see papa."

"Oh, Marjorie, how disgusted he must have been!" cried the elder sister, with pious horror; yet rather enjoying the thought, and the sight of the heightened color in Marjorie's cheeks.

"He *was* very much disgusted," assented Marjorie, without reluctance; "he would have been more scornful to me than usual, only for the fact of its impossibility."

"Even Neil says you have no filial piety," mourned Miss Castillain, regretfully.

"Some day I will study the part from you," was the slow reply; "but, Louie, don't let us speak of— The words I came in on purpose to say, I have not said yet. I seem as if I were always saying them," she added, sadly, "and always deciding never to say them again; yet —yet here I am to plead once more my old request."

"You need not repeat it," struck in Louisa, coldly; "I know what you mean, and it will be as useless to say it now as it has always been. It is only an insult to me for you to be perpetually telling me what you wish my conduct to be toward that wicked man and his sister—if she really be his sister. I will not go on listening to you; I will not; so you need not try."

Louisa's voice rose shrilly in her excitement.

"I will not try, then," answered Marjorie, the words almost rushing from her hot, quivering lips; "I have said again and again that I will not, and yet I always break my word."

"Yes, you do," concurred Louisa, her handkerchief once more applied to her dry eyes, "and I never shall have any peace until that trial is over, and the man is transported for life, and the girl disgraced forever."

"Oh, Louie, hush!—hush!—have a little pity!"

The quick, pained cry just faintly reached the ears of Colonel Stuart as he passed unobserved by the drawing-room windows, and made him, almost unconsciously, hesitate at the door before ringing. And while he waited, Marjorie broke her word again, and pleaded yet once more for the solitary man in the county jail, whose life and liberty seemed to her to be in her sister's power; and then for the lonely girl to whom it would be worse than death to be brought back to the lonely home she knew.

But again, as it had been day after day, the

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prayer was unheeded, the request coldly denied; and once more the younger girl's great earnestness—always a hopeful earnestness—slowly died.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Louisa at last, as she rose and shook out the rich, crisp plaits of her tunic, "do leave off these theatrical scenes. You would, if you could see how unbecoming they are. Let those people alone. What have you to do with them, or they with you—low impostors as they are? If I did not feel really lowered by your conduct, I could laugh at it; but I can not even laugh, to see you making yourself so ridiculous for a man who has been committed for murder, and who can not hope to be found guilty of less, whatever people may say about the defense being reserved. Bah! I should like to know where they are to find a defense; though Colonel Stuart, I do verily believe—"

But Louisa stopped at last. What was the use of finishing her tirade without an audience?

Marjorie had risen slowly from her coaxing attitude, and left the room. The shafts had sped after her from Louisa's tongue, but it would be useless to hurl another now, for the door had closed quietly behind the younger sister, and the elder one was left alone with her spleen, feeling uncomfortably mortified, as we do when "left behind," even in a quarrel.

Crossing the hall, with her cheeks and eyes aflame, Marjorie became suddenly aware that Colonel Stuart was entering it. He put down his hat, and advanced to her with the easy, quiet at-homeness which characterized him. "Miss Marjorie," he said, retaining her hand only for an instant, and not seeming to see the emotion in her face, "I hear your father is out at present. May I wait for him?"

Not a direct question, beyond that obvious fact of his waiting, yet Marjorie knew instinctively that he wished to speak to her before her father's arrival, and that he had timed his visit for that purpose.

She led him in silence to that sombre and ugly room where Mr. Castillain's business interviews were always held, and, closing the door upon them, waited for him to speak.

"Sir Neil Athelston has gone to London this afternoon, Miss Marjorie," he said, as he put her a chair beside the smoldering fire. "He has, as I suspected, obtained a clue to Miss Chester's whereabouts, and is following it up now."

Marjorie knew that the colonel's eyes were not fixed in curiosity upon her face; she knew him far too well to imagine it; yet she could not help the slow, rich color gathering there, as she turned to him, astonished and grieved.

"Oh, Colonel Stuart, how very, very sorry I am! We have tried so hard to prevent this, and now for us to have so utterly failed! How is it?"

"Do not say utterly failed yet, as even this clue may be unavailing. But Athelston's chance was always much better than ours, as I told you. He had professional aid acting secretly for him; we could not call in professional aid to conceal her, could we? It would have been as good as an acknowledgment of guilt or fear on her part."

"Yes, you told me that before," replied Marjorie, as if unwillingly; "but I always thought that the chance would be greater on the side of right and compassion than on that of wrong and selfishness."

"I fancy it will be so when we can look back and see the whole way clearly," he answered, gently; "now we can only grope a few steps at a time; not seeing the winning or the losing side, only trusting."

"When a thing is disappointing," Marjorie said, "I always ask insanely why it is so. No, of course we could not get professional aid to keep Miss Chester away, or to upset Neil on his way to the station; so we shall have to fold our hands and look on, while the poor girl's heart breaks in that miserable court. Colonel Stuart," she added, with a quick, impetuous change in her voice, "can Neil—*even* Neil—ever be so really cruel as to bring her here?"

"He would not think it cruel," said the colonel, while he pondered the emphasized word in her speech. "He thinks it cruel to leave her alone, as he presumes her to be. You can not blame him for the cruelty which *you* see in this act, because he sees it so differently."

"I don't think he sees it at all," returned the girl, with quick contempt; "he only sees how disagreeable it is to be foiled, for the first time in his life, and how much pleasanter it was for him to have Miss Chester about his house. Surely he will never take her there, where we can see the poor girl's misery, without being able to help her or to share it? I promised to do what I could for her, and *that* is what we are doing."

"This is not your doing," put in the colonel, gently, noticing how the girl's hot fingers were clasped together in her earnestness. "I hope Athelston will bring her to The Anchorage, if he brings her back at all. Adelaide will be glad to have her."

"Oh, Colonel Stuart!" whispered Marjorie, "I wish the clue had been given to you instead of to Neil."

He smiled, but his eyes filled with a great gladness at her words.

"I wish so, too," he said; "but let us feel sure that he will use his information kindly at last."

Marjorie's lip curled.

"I can not feel sure—I can not fancy it. I have as little faith in that as in Louie's forbearance at the trial."

"Is she not more lenient yet?"

"Less so—less and less so every day. Oh, if I could but—"

The words ceased suddenly, but Colonel Stuart knew what was the prayer she urged so often and so vainly with her sister.

"I think that is papa," she cried, suddenly starting up. "Colonel Stuart, has your wish to see him any thing to do with—with what we have been talking about?"

He laughed his negative—partly in the very heartiness of his contradiction, partly to bring a smile to her face, before she should encounter her father's keen and suspicious glance.

Slowly Marjorie mounted the dark old oaken staircase, as the twilight shadows settled in the corners, and spread gloomily from step to step. Her close, dark habit, unrelieved by any color, was like one of the embodied shadows clinging about her; yet her beautiful eyes were soft and wistful, and her lips were quivering like a child's.

An hour afterward, she descended the scantily lighted staircase, in a softly flowing Cashmere dress of delicate blue, and with a tender winter

rose in her brown hair; yet now her face was still and grave, her lips firmly and almost scornfully set, and her step slow and listless. What need to hasten when there was a whole long evening to spend alone with Louisa?

But an unexpected greeting awaited her when she entered the drawing-room.

"Marjorie," her sister exclaimed, turning sharply to her, "why did you not tell me Colonel Stuart was coming to dinner?"

"I didn't know," said Marjorie, coldly; "I didn't like to ask him whether he should stay if papa invited him; and, if I had, I should still have thought it extremely unlikely that papa *would* invite him."

"I had no idea of it when I ordered dinner, and I'm as vexed as I can be," chafed Miss Castillain, taking out and re-arranging the jet butterfly in her hair, as she stood before the mirror. "I'm always being treated in this unfair way."

"Are you quite sure Colonel Stuart *is* staying to dine here?" inquired the younger sister, in a voice that was slow and quiet in its scorn. "I should have considered it so very unlikely."

"Don't be a hypocrite," was the retort. "He must have told you."

"If he had told me," said Marjorie, quietly, as she stood with her back to the table, watching her sister's manœuvres at the glass, "I should have begged him not to come."

"I shall believe that when I hear you do it."

"I should have begged him not to come," repeated the girl, unmoved. "I should have said, 'Why should you come, Colonel Stuart, when you have such a pleasant home of your own? Why should you come here? There's nothing but a gloomy dinner of feeble soup and our own everlasting mutton. My father will only entertain you with his experience in keeping twice as many sheep as any one else on half as much land; Louisa will only pretend to cry, and look as lugubrious as a clown off the stage; and I shall only snap at every body and every thing, and fail to get much flavor to my life even out of that. Why, in the name of all that's jocund, should you come?' I should have said that, if I had had the faintest idea that he was insane enough to think of it. I shall never again give Colonel Stuart credit for any wisdom at all."

With a pleased laugh, that was not at all beautifying to the fair, classical face, Louisa turned suddenly from the mirror.

"Oh, Marjorie!" she cried, with a little affected shriek and clasp of her hands, "look who is here! Oh, Colonel Stuart, we did not hear you! I hope you did not overhear my sister's speech? She couldn't help it; she thought she was alone. Did you overhear it?"

"Yes," he answered, looking across into Marjorie's vexed eyes, "I heard. Miss Marjorie, why did you ever give me credit for any wisdom at all, and how have I forfeited that credit now?"

"Of course I gave you credit for it," she answered, calmly, though her heart was beating heavily in her vexation; "because I felt it must be wisdom which dictated your perpetual lectures to me; and you have forfeited that credit now by stopping to dine with us."

"And why?"

"Because we are such a—horrid family."

The words darted out brokenly, but still she kept her calm, defiant attitude and expression.

"Marjorie is provoked to-night, and—and perhaps not very well, Colonel Stuart," put in Louisa, apologetically. "Please don't be hurt by her words; we are always glad to receive you at Hawkedale. You believe this, don't you?"

"No," answered the colonel, slowly, while a laugh gathered in his eyes; "I do not believe your sister is glad to receive me now. It makes no difference, though; I am just as glad to *be* received."

"Marjorie, you didn't mean that, did you?" pleaded her sister, coaxingly.

"I mean exactly what I said, Colonel Stuart," returned Marjorie, her eyes wonderfully bright, in the defiance which struggled with their unusual shyness. "I meant that I *had* thought you wiser than most of us; but when you came here voluntarily to hear our bickerings, and see our tempers, and eat our wearisome mutton, and learn how to feed it cheaply, I lose the idea entirely, and pity your ignorance."

The smile that puckered her lips was irresistible, and Colonel Stuart laughed with heartiness.

"There is dinner," put in Miss Castillain, a little discomfited; "and here is papa. Colonel Stuart, will you come?"

But before he gave her his arm he spoke an instant to Marjorie, the laughter still in his voice.

"I like the mutton, Miss Marjorie, and I like being taught to do things without going to unnecessary expense; and, besides that, I have not told you" (the voice was lowered here, and only she could catch it) "all about Athelston's journey."

"What's that? Is Stuart up to a joke—eh?" questioned Mr. Castillain, with his keen, abrupt chuckle, as he let his younger daughter lay her unwilling hand upon his seedy coat-sleeve.

"I believe he must have been, papa; or he is very hungry," she answered, demurely; "for he was proposing *revenir à nos moutons.*"

Miss Castillain's polite little speech was broken into by her cavalier's stifled laugh as he caught Marjorie's double meaning.

Not one chance fell to Marjorie, all that night, of hearing what Colonel Stuart had to tell her about Neil's new search, and, in real despair, she went into the hall at last, just before she said good-night. But Louisa came out with him, and destroyed that last chance, too.

"Oh, I forgot one thing, Miss Marjorie," he remarked, turning back from the door, as if with a sudden remembrance, "Mrs. Cheere wants to see you."

"Thank you," she answered, so eagerly that she hastened to speak further when she detected the gratitude in her own voice, "I will go to-morrow, Colonel Stuart. Thank you for bringing me the message. I shall be out at noon to-morrow, and I will go to the cottage then."

He said "Thank you" too, almost as if unconsciously. And then he was gone.

"A nice, agreeable temper you have been in all the evening," said Louisa, as the girls entered the drawing-room again. "You would not say a good word of Neil once, though you saw papa getting angry about it. I'm sure Colonel Stuart thought you most flippant, and he is sure to tell Neil."

"Never! *He* is honorable, whatever I may be. Now, papa, do you feel inclined for a dose of cribbage?"

And so the girl, tired and sad, sat down to the game she knew her father enjoyed, and let her sister's speeches pass unresented and unnoticed; the unselfish nature conquering, as it generally did, and fighting its triumphant way through the hasty impulses and warm, impetuous anger which belonged to her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE STORM AMONG THE HILLS.

The dusk of that November afternoon, two weeks before, was deepening rapidly, when Lina Chester woke to consciousness upon the grass beside the mountain lake, and rose slowly to her feet. Quick, almost as a lightning-flash, the past hour rushed back to her; and she stood in the solitude, bewildered and afraid, her cold hands pressed upon her temples, and her eyes wide and dark and desolate.

No one was within sight; no one in the whole wide extent of valley and hill-side. The silent water held its secret then, as safely as it held it through the anxious months that followed, and she turned from it, shuddering in every limb. Where were they gone?

Slowly all—even of what she had *not* seen—grew clear to the girl's dazed mind; and then she turned from the water, and, with a sudden, uncontrollable impulse—not of personal fear or self-preservation, but of something stronger than either to the loving and brave-hearted girl—fled across the hills beyond the water-fall, fled rapidly, lightly, and without glancing back, as we only flee in a great dread.

Gradually the valley narrowed, shut in by the heavy, frowning hills; the dark firs rose gloomily against the winter evening sky, or stood in dense blackness against the dim mountain-side; the swollen brook, leaping here restively in its narrow bed, dashed on among the rocks in the narrowing ravine, with a sound that was weird in its strong reverberation. Closer and closer came the heavy rocks to hem her in, dark masses leaning now above the rugged path as if about to fall upon her. In the deepening darkness, and the loneliness and silence, the girl at last grew frightened in her heart.

So tiny and powerless and helpless she felt in this awful solitude, the hills gathering more and more closely upon her as she hastened breathlessly on. With a shivering of her eyelids, she stood and looked down upon the water, as it hurried away, seeming to seek, like herself—only in wisdom and in innocence, she felt—an outlet from this sombre bed. Only in wisdom and in innocence! Did the whole difference lie in that?

Long and intently Lina gazed and wondered. Could any cry which she might utter be heard in the world beyond the hills? Hill behind hill, hill beyond hill, they stretched. Could a tired cry, even a dying cry, pierce beyond them? Or would it only echo and re-echo among the rocks around, waking weird answering voices that might form a fitting coranach? Was this gray, restless water deep enough to hide her, or would it rush on, and leave *something* lying there, to make the solitude even more ghastly, and turn the silence even more horribly into the silence of death?

Covering her eyes at the thought, Lina turned from the brink of the noisy brook, and made her way once more along the rocky and uneven path. Her stiff, white lips were moving slowly, as if she fancied that, even in her isolation and helplessness—even in this immense loneliness, and with the shadow of a great guilt touching her—there was One who would hear those low-breathed words.

Would she ever reach a human habitation? If she were but at the top of the hill, she thought, she could breathe without this heavy, frightened pain; and she should find a cottage sooner, perhaps. She had begun her flight with one longing only, thinking nothing of either fatigue or loneliness; but now another longing had come, and grew intense as she sped on and on. The longing to find refuge in a human habitation before the utter darkness fell upon her, and she was left alone here in the tremendous loneliness, that nameless voice ever whispering to her the terrible word which had seemed to pierce her heart, before she fell beside the treacherous mountain tarn.

She knew now that she was one of the few—thank Heaven, only the few!—who feel the full horror of that word, as we can never feel it, while we only hear it, or see it, again and again repeated in the newspapers.

Stifling that thought as quickly as she could, she climbed on, though the way was rugged and her feet unutterably weary. A mist was creeping now across the hills, and a light, swift rain began to fall. Bending her head against it as she climbed, she could advance but slowly. The mist came on, covering the distant hills. Only the dim outlines of the near ones were visible now, as she struggled on higher and higher, each step more difficult, and each minute the rain falling more heavily.

Behind, and far below her now, the chill gray water rushed on its course, its maddening and monotonous sound subdued and broken. Around her, through the mist, she saw sometimes the dim and shivering sheep huddled in twos and threes beneath a bare winter tree. Above her, she still saw the dim outlines of the nearer hills. A longing came upon Lina to scream; to scream at the very top of her voice; not so much in the vain hope of an answer as in the fierce desire of disturbing the indescribable weight of silence.

The wind was rising, and the rain increased rapidly as it did so. The stormy gusts tore through the fir-trees, and drove the rain before them, straight and pitilessly down upon the tired, stooping little figure.

Ah!—dear Heaven, kind Heaven—there was a light at last; a square of ruddy, cheery light, glimmering in a cottage window on before her. With the sure instinct born of a sore need, Lina made her way to the cottage-door, and knocked.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SHELTER.

There was little need for Lina to tell her story in order to gain admission to the cottage. The old woman, its single occupant, who raised her light and let it fall upon the wan, frightened face, waited for no plea. She drew the girl to the glowing little fire, and, moved by that com-

passion which in its purity and unsuspiciousness comes straight from Heaven, had clasped warm, tender arms about her, when a sleep, that was deep and sudden as death, fell upon the weary girl, and blotted out her miserable heart-weariness.

Beside the little bed where she lay so white and helpless, the old woman watched alone; for no doctor could be reached from the isolated mountain cottage, even if she could have left her patient to go in search of one. She was glad of this next day, when Lina, her great dark eyes so full of gratitude, yet of their old fear, too, moaned to her to let no one else come. So she watched and nursed alone, with that tempered strength which seems always lent to watchers beside a sick-bed; and at last memory came back; and life returned to the wan face that lay upon the hard, brown pillow.

"I wish," sighed the old woman to herself, "that that 'Rachel' she's been so often sobbing for when she didn't know it could come, if only to comfort her, poor dear! But I couldn't go to find her, even if I knew where she was; and as I've managed so far, I'll try to manage till she's about again."

"I live most lonely here, my dear," she said to Lina one day, when the girl lay in the ease of returning strength. "I see no one from Monday to Saturday, except just once a month (one Saturday in every month), when I walk into Churchill to see my son, and get the money he allows me, and to do my bit of marketing for the month. You may fancy it's no light walk for me—nine miles, good; and I have to start this weather as soon as ever it is daylight. Still I consider it my bit of holiday, and next Saturday's the day."

The delicate, pale lips quivered as Lina spoke, her thoughts running wildly on before her words.

"Are you not near a station?—I mean, could you not go by train?"

"I'm just two miles from a station, and nine miles from town," was the slow answer; "but I never hesitate, my dear. I never have been in one of those railway things, and never shall go. They're unnatural. I don't quite trust them."

"Yet you are not afraid of living in this lonely spot?" the girl said.

"No; it's always been natural to me, just as it's natural to the sheep to lie on the hill-side without fear. It isn't being alone I'm afraid of."

"Have you no neighbors," asked Lina, flushing vividly, as if the dim eyes and unsuspicious heart could read the real motive of her questioning, "who come in here to have a chat with you, or to—to tell you the news from Churchill?"

"Just perhaps once in a while, my dear," was the cheery answer, "but not often, for I've none within a'most a mile, and I don't care about it. I can live very snugly without any news. I hear it all when I go into Churchill. I shall hear it all on Saturday."

The scarlet crept higher and higher on Lina's face—the beautiful face that had lain for days so white and still—and she nervously tried to hide it.

"I have had one neighbor in since you've been here, my dear," the old woman continued, almost soothingly, "but I didn't tell of you being here at all. I wouldn't, till I knew you wouldn't mind it."

The tears crowded to the girl's eyes at this kind thought.

"Oh, how good you are to me!" she cried; "and I can never repay you!"

"Hush, my dear! you'll grieve me sorely if you take to talk like that."

And then, in the real refinement of her Heaven-taught compassion, the old woman moved softly about the room, as if busy for herself, talking of other things, and drawing the girl's thoughts to feel that her presence in the cottage was brightening and cheering. And when the tired look would creep back into the worn face, and the feverish light to the wide eyes, she would find it necessary to go into the other room, and leave the girl to rest alone. But what was this resting alone to Lina? With her face hidden and her thin fingers clasped, she only moaned to Heaven for pardon, because she must deceive another who had been kind and good and pitiful to her, and because she must abuse the simple trust which had been reposed in her, and had saved her.

It was Saturday morning, and by the light of a flickering candle Lina's kind old nurse was preparing for her long walk into Churchill. Lina had risen as early as *she* had, and was helping her deftly in this preparation, hovering about her with prompt and dainty little attentions such as the old woman had never received before through all her seventy years.

"I wish you'd just lain still, my dear," she said, watching the girl's anxious face (which was pale to-day, she fancied, with even a new pallor); "I'd rather see you resting than troubling about here after me—I'm used to wait on myself. Why, bless me! I haven't had such a breakfast set and made for me I don't know when, if ever; nor am I used to having every thing prepared o my hand in this way. But I can't bear to see you do it."

"I like to do it—so much," whispered Lina; "I couldn't lie in bed to-day—I'm so strong now. I like to do this best of all. I shall like to remember it!"

"I suppose I'm ready now, my dear," said the old woman, laying a clean white cloth to cover the bottom of her basket, and wondering when Lina would turn her eyes fully to hers again; "and all I've got to ask is this: is there any body in Churchill that will want to know—I mean, my dear, have you any message to send by me? I'll take and learn it off, and give it just as you give it to me."

The dark, sad eyes met hers at last, yet still with a shrinking in their depths that almost looked like shame.

"I know you would," the girl said, gently; "but, kind nurse, I have no message to send, no one to send a message to."

Wistfully, almost humbly, as she spoke, Lina put her arms about the neck of the old woman who had so pitifully tended and sheltered her, and left a gentle, lingering kiss upon the withered cheek.

"My dear," the woman whispered, in her astonishment, "take care of yourself to-day; I don't like to leave you, but there's no help for it. I'll be as quick as ever I can. Why are you dressed?"

"I'm coming with you a little way," said Lina, turning the key in the door as they left the cot-

tage. "I dare say you never lock the door and take the key with you when you only go away for a few minutes, but I'm not so brave as you are, and I shall feel more comfortable."

Again, upon the hill-side path, out of sight of the cottage, Lina kissed her kind old friend, and said good-bye; and then she stood and watched her, until a turn in the rugged way hid them from each other.

"Thanking me so makes a perfect baby of me," muttered the old woman, rubbing her dim eyes, "kissing me and thanking me as if I'd been—Well, well, it's no use thinking of it, and making myself look foolish all day. It will be pleasant to have her waiting there for me to-night. How many years is it since I had any one to welcome me at my home-coming? Ah, I could hardly count the years. Perhaps she'll even come a little way to meet me in the gloaming."

This thought kept recurring to her happily all through her nine-mile walk; but she uttered no word of it when she reached her son's house, and met his questions. Loitering beside her, and jestingly discussing her probable purchases, he moved the cloth which covered the bottom of her basket.

"Why, mother!" he exclaimed, as he did so, "it isn't like you, to have the key of your house loose here? Where's your safe under-pocket?"

"The what—the what, lad?" she cried, a sick faintness seeming to seize her. (The lad to her was a wrinkled, gray-haired man to others.)

"The key of your cottage, generally so snugly packed in an out-of-the-way pocket," he said; "you must have been very careless this morning."

The marketing that day was done at random. Even the little present for Lina (about which so much kind anxiety had been felt) was forgotten. No thought had the kind old woman that was half so urgent a one as the thought that she must hasten home and open the cottage-door for the girl whom she had nursed back to health, and who, weak and delicate still, was locked out of the house now, with no chance of warmth, or food, or resting-place. How came the key to have dropped from her hand into the basket?

The long walk was over at last; the locked-up cottage was within sight, and now the dim eyes looked around, eagerly searching among the shadows. Ah! this was to have been such a pleasant home-coming. No young figure disturbed the solitude of the old familiar scene. No voice answered to her faint, troubled call. The rooms, when she entered them, had become the solitary empty rooms of old times; the solitary empty rooms which—she said to herself, with a tired glance around—of course they would always be.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE.

The third-class train to London passed the village station at eight o'clock, so Lina had an hour for her two-mile walk. She had watched her kind nurse out of sight, through hot tears; her last glance had rested on the little cottage where she had been so kindly welcomed, and she walked on rapidly in the dim morning twilight.

The village station looked dismal enough, with yesterday's ashes in the grates, and yesterday's dust and rubbish lying undisturbed as yet. There were several third-class passengers waiting; some wearing the wan, dull look which she knew she wore herself; others busy and excited, claiming prompt acquaintance with each other, just as if another station would not separate them again, perhaps forever.

Quite silently Lina sat in a corner of the dusty carriage, when the train at last rolled slowly on toward London, while noisy voices about her talked of things which came so near her own frightened thoughts that her very heart ached as she waited breathlessly for what might follow.

The glass was dull enough, but Lina gazed through it into the mist of the November morning, dreading to turn her head. On they went, a little faster now, through plowed fields where the upturned soil and the men and horses all had the same dull hue which the sky reflected. It was quite a relief presently to pass a group of workmen standing on the edge of the line, in their white blouses. On again, past gray fields, gray lanes, gray cottages. Once, when in the midst of one of these gray fields, she saw a little silent pool on which the brown bulrushes leaned and faded, she shivered with a horrible remembrance. And when the cold, bright sun pierced through the clouds at last, and the fir-trees stood up like columns against the brightening eastern light, memory came back, bringing those fir-trees on the mountain. Ah! could that one memory ever again be absent from her mind?

The slow third-class train deposited its passengers at Euston, and became, for a time, a useless piece of station furniture. Through the London streets (timidly and shrinkingly, as she had trodden them just once before) Lina walked in the dusk which gathers there so early on a November afternoon. Some who met her noticed pityingly the sadness of her young white face; but they were the few. The many passed on, busy and engrossed as is the crowd of London, beyond the crowd of any other city.

"Conduit Street—number seven—at last," murmured the girl to herself, as she stopped before the familiar door. "I knew the number was right upon my letter to Rachel. I wonder why she did not answer."

"Miss M'Mullen?" repeated the servant who answered Lina's ring. "Oh, she left here months ago. I believe she went to Arthur Street; you know it—out of Oxford Street. I'm not sure about the number, but I think it's twenty; you may as well try twenty, at any rate. It'll do no harm if you're wrong by a door or two. But I think it's twenty."

"Thank you," said Lina, earnestly. She knew London enough to know that even such civility and assistance as this were not always to be met with, and then she turned wearily away.

Along George Street she went as quickly as she could, trembling with an inexplicable sudden nervousness as the statue rose before her, dim and gigantic in the twilight. Passing through Hanover Square, she loitered a little; its hush and emptiness were like a rest and protection to her. Whether she might be going the most direct or most indirect way she did not know; she only knew that in this way she could reach Arthur Street eventually—could reach it and

Rachel—and she tried to make that thought dispel all fear.

Oxford Street at last. Arthur Street lay a long way eastward; a long, long way of dazzling glare, of jostling and of crushing; a long, long way, made more bitter by whispered remarks and quizzical salutes. An endless way she was beginning to think it, when a policeman pointed out to her the turning she sought.

Into the quiet side-street she hurried, as into a refuge, but a few steps brought her to the edge of a noisy, surging crowd. She must make her way past, and she did so, trembling with a nameless fear. Then she remembered happily that she should not have to pass it again. She should be with Rachel soon—safe and at rest with Rachel.

Ah, here was No. 19! One more—20! A quiet knock the girl gave, her heart beating heavily, now that the end of her journey was so near. The answer to her question came this time even more depressingly than it had come before.

Miss M'Mullen had left there after one month; had gone to live lower down on the other side. She (the speaker) did not know the number, did not know whether Miss M'Mullen would be there now or not. She could not trouble where all her lodgers went to, but it certainly was lower down on the other side.

Lina stood a moment after the door was shut, feeling very hopeless and bewildered. Then she roused herself. "Lower down on the other side." Not far away, perhaps. She should only have a few more minutes to spend in doubt and weariness—then rest and safety with Rachel.

"If Rachel is not here?" The vague, haunting doubt had forced its way at last through all her hope and bravery and confidence; and now it harassed and frightened her as it would, of its own fierce will.

"If there were no one to go to—" As the doubt took this cruel form, and would be battled with no longer, Lina instinctively sought for her purse.

"There was at least enough—"

A sudden stop in her slow walk; a sudden weakness and despair. She had no purse at all. Could it have been taken from her in the crowd? She could not tell; she only knew that she had had it at Euston, and that now it was gone.

"Penniless and alone—if Rachel is not here," she whispered to herself, in a dull, dazed agony. "But—but Rachel *will* be here," she cried, trying to kill the other thought. "Oh, she must be here! What was it? Where was it? Lower down—on the other side."

So lower down she went, and crossed the street. A last desperate courage had come to the girl, and she knocked at one door after another, with her urgent, oft-repeated question. And as she turned from each, her heart cried out, in its agony, for this one friend who had taken her in and comforted her in another far-back time of misery almost like this.

"Miss M'Mullen? Yes, I know her." (Ah, the longed-for answer at last!) "I'm sure to know her, for she lived here some bit—and a decent, respectable woman she was. But she fell ill, and I couldn't have her any longer—not I, unless I could have afforded to lose all my other lodgers. So she went—"

"Where?" faltered Lina. "Can you tell me where? Is it far from here? A long walk will it be?"

The woman looked curiously, even suspiciously, into the weary, dazed eyes.

"Why, bless me!" she exclaimed, "are you a friend of hers, and don't know where they took her? To hospital, of course—Guy's, I remember—and there she died almost directly. There, I'm called; it's always the way. You must excuse my shutting the door."

The street was a dull, prosaic street, yet it seemed as if the last scene of a life-tragedy were to be enacted now in one of its shadowy spots, where a frail, shivering figure leaned, faint and sick, against the post of a closed door.

Weary, starved, and penniless! Weary, yet with no hope of rest before her; starved, yet at no fireside could she either claim or buy a place; penniless in the heart of the great, abundant city, where every thing could be procured for money, and nothing could be procured without it.

Up into the gleam of gas-light opposite came some one with a firm, slow, almost cautious step; up straight toward Lina, but very slowly.

There was no need of haste. He had followed her for miles, and knew how wearily she walked. So he crossed the street but slowly—a gentleman with a warm, handsome face, and in a warm, handsome dress.

Weak and small and fragile the girl looked, leaning there in the shadow, and the tall, strong figure staggered an instant at this glimpse of her; then as his hands, in their warmth and eagerness, went out to meet her, the hurt, proud pain gave place to a pitying, protecting love upon his handsome Saxon face, and made it almost noble.

And the mental darkness which had been falling on Lina Chester vanished suddenly in the lightning flash of a new and terrible fear, when she saw that she was standing face to face with Sir Neil Athelston.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A NIGHT JOURNEY.

Lina stood an instant, facing Sir Neil, with that proud shrinking in her eyes which he had seen before—he most of any one; but her will and power were weak and tired, his strong and firm; and so, almost before she was aware, she was driving rapidly through the lighted streets, and Sir Neil was opposite her in the cab. The cab was small, and the space limited, hence he was close beside her, as she knew; yet—as she did *not* know, for the other thought was all in all to her—he was really as far from her as he could possibly be.

He could not help but see how unwelcome his presence was, and he had the delicacy not to force it upon her unnecessarily. So he leaned forward in his corner, looking from the damp glass out upon the uninteresting prospect it disclosed, while he longed with an ardent longing to throw his strong, warm arms about the little trembling figure opposite him.

The horse was pulled up suddenly before the station-door, and Sir Neil got down and paid the fare at once. Then he offered his hand to Lina.

There was something new in his manner and

bearing to-night; something which made her rise without a word, and step down upon the pavement to him. She did not understand what it was—perhaps she did not care to try—but it made her leave the cab at his silent bidding, and wait for him; though she had scornfully passed his proffered hand, and was standing now as far from him as she could. He only allowed her a few moments to do so; he had paid the man, and so was free to join her at once.

"This way, Miss Chester, please."

That was all he said, slackening his steps to hers as she slowly turned, and so they walked together through the vestibule, and out upon the platform, to the door of the ladies' waiting-room.

"There's a splendid fire!" said Sir Neil as cheerily as he could. "Try to keep yourself warm and snug for half an hour here; we have that time to wait before we start. I am sorry; waiting is always such disagreeable work."

They had halted at the door, and for the first time Lina looked up full into her companion's face. He bent eagerly to catch her words.

"Start where?—start where?" she faltered. "I am not going—I can not go. Oh, let me stay in London!"

"It is just as impossible," replied Sir Neil, a little huskily, "as that I could, with my own hands, lay you on the rails there when the train was coming."

"Oh! it is worse than that to have to go back!" sobbed the girl, brokenly. "Lay me there. It were far better than that—that they should make me swear his life away. Oh! leave me here!"

Neil's answer to the confused words would hardly come. For the first time in his life he was weak with pity, and overcome by the longing to show a mercy which was foreign to him.

"When you have rested," he said, very gently, but still acting only as he chose, "you will see what an impossible request you make. You would have need to execrate me all your life if I left you here alone in London."

"Oh, I would rather," moaned Lina, too weak now even to sob, "I would so much rather stay here!"

"We are going home, dear little girl," he said, sorrowfully gazing into her entreating face, and addressing her (in his new character of protector) as he would have addressed a child, "and it will be all right for you then."

"Home!" she cried, with a sudden shiver; "I have no home. Every home that is given me is taken from me again. I have no home to go to; I only want to be away from *there*."

"But will you not trust those whose only wish—"

"You have always been cruel to me," she interrupted, desolately; "you are cruellest of all now."

"You are tired," he said, quite tenderly, but with no thought of giving up his own desire; "you do not see it all as you will see it to-morrow morning. Come; here is a snug sofa close to the fire."

In his new and easy assumption of authority, he made her rest there, putting his own fur rug about her; and then he went away, returning in a few minutes with a tumbler of hot wine-and-water, and a plate of delicately cut sandwiches. Other ladies sat about the room, but, even with their eyes upon her, Lina could not take the plate. She did put her cold lips to the glass, but hardly for more than an instant. Half a dozen eyes followed Sir Neil as he left the room again, and then turned inquisitively to the girl's beautiful pale face.

"On their wedding tour, and she's been taken ill. How unpleasant!"

"A petted and pampered girl, who likes the *rôle* of invalid in public, to exhibit the devotion of her handsome, strong young husband."

"Not married, and never will be. Well, she's pretty enough for any thing."

These the three remarks consequent on the scrutinizing of the six eyes, and about as true as are most of the blind remarks made upon fellow-travelers in the totally unsuggestive atmosphere of a waiting-room, enduring those interminable minutes between trains coming and trains going.

"Now, Miss Chester, this is our train."

Lina was leaning back in the corner of a couch, looking before her with eyes that saw nothing of this room and its occupants, when Sir Neil's quiet words aroused her. He had taken up the rug and thrown it over one arm, the other was offered her. Her steps tottered feebly as she rose—after the rest the weariness was more evident than before—but still she passed the offered hand again, and walked from the room as steadily as she could.

Once more, away from those staring eyes, she entreated to be left. But this entreaty was as unavailing as the last had been.

"Your seats, sir. I've taken care of them."

The porter, who had had the "grandee" in his eye all through the previous half-hour, came forward now, fearing that if the lady lingered there, the train might, after all, go without them. Such a pity as that would be, after taking four tickets!

In the farther corners of the carriage at which Sir Neil and Lina stopped, two ladies sat luxuriously buried in shawls and rugs; two quiet, experienced lady travelers.

"Now, lock the door," said Sir Neil, slipping a half-crown into the man's hand, when he and Lina were in, and he had again made her comfortable in his furs; "I have taken the rest of the carriage."

"I know, sir," put in the guard, coming up and turning the key; "I'm aware, sir. Have you all you need?"

"All right," curtly replied Sir Neil, who had piled the hot-water tins one upon another for a high foot-stool for Lina.

"Churchill you said, didn't you, sir? There's no need to bother you again until then. The other ladies go still farther north."

"Yes," answered Neil, who had taken care to ascertain this fact before he took Lina's place.

Then he settled himself in his seat, and opened the evening paper; and, somehow, as they sped on, Lina grew conscious how thoughtfully he was taking care of her through this journey. The presence of the ladies prevented any reference to exciting themes, and was, too, just the companionship she wished; yet it was a relief to know that no one else could join them, and no inquisitive eyes probe her as those had done at Euston. It was a great relief to her, too, that Sir Neil still lounged in his own seat, with his old lazy insouciance, the lappets of his high seal-skin cap down

over his ears, and the paper still held between his eyes and hers.

It was not until the night journey was nearly over that suddenly all this thought was effaced for a moment only by one chance glance at the quiet Saxon face. Oh! why was she there with him, going to help to kill Gerard? He was cruel to have brought her with him—cruel, as he always had been to her. He knew she was alone and unprotected. He knew she was in his power, and he had sought her out to give her the bitterest task of all her bitter life. He had been cruel to her always—always; even more cruel than he had been to every one else; selfish and heartless. He! The affianced husband of a lady a thousand times better and nobler and truer than himself; the son of the mistress who had paid her for her services just as she paid her servants; the man who had begged her to accompany him from his own house, where he was even then entertaining his betrothed wife! *He* to protect her now!

Care! what care had any one for her? Ah, if Rachel had only been spared! If Heaven did not always claim the good and merciful, and leave those who had no pity and compassion!

Athwart this dark, rebellious thought, there fell soft rays of light for Lina. She recalled the old woman in her cottage among the hills. She recalled Marjorie's warm, trustful sympathy. She recalled Colonel Stuart's goodness to her and to Gerard; but this thought bordered so closely on her one overmastering fear, that she hid her face in the corner of the carriage, and wept for the first time through all the hours of that interminable day.

Not one movement did Neil make toward her through this silent weeping, though it hurt and pained him as no woman's weeping had ever pained him in his life before. Not one word did he attempt of consolation or sympathy, and, for the first time, he acted with a real thoughtfulness in his courtesy.

"Churchill."

The name that had grown familiar to Lina through the past summer struck on her ear now like a knell.

"That's right," said Sir Neil, with an effort at cheeriness, as he rose and took the wraps gently from about Lina. "It is only just midnight now, Miss Chester; a tiresome journey, but it hasn't taken us very long, and—I declare here's Mrs. Esdaile."

The tone was the same tone throughout the speech, to all seeming light and cheering, though in reality anxious and troubled; but at the last words, uttered in feigned surprise, Lina's whole face brightened with a swift, sudden gladness; momentary only, perhaps, but so vivid that Neil, when he saw it, rejoiced in his heart that he had had the thought to telegraph to Stuart from Euston.

"I am so glad to have been here, Miss Chester," said Mrs. Esdaile, warmly taking her by the hand. "Sir Neil, you must tell Lady Athelston I have taken present possession of this tired girl. We have a much shorter drive before us than you have; besides, our brougham is here, and you will have to take a fly; and, besides," added the lady, with her pleasant tact, "I have Marjorie staying with me to-night at The Anchorage, *and she would never forgive me if she heard* I had met Miss Chester and not brought her to see her."

At the sound of Marjorie's name, Lina's clasp on Mrs. Esdaile's arm grew closer. "It seemed," as she said to her brother afterward, "like an appeal from the girl to be taken to Marjorie, and for a moment overcame the evident dread she felt of advancing even one step nearer to us who had brought her here, to meet what she shuns far more than death itself."

Sir Neil Athelston stood at the door of the brougham, talking quietly to Mrs. Esdaile on indifferent subjects. His eyes, every now and then, sought Lina's with swift intentness, and as they rested on her face (so pitifully pale in the lamplight) there grew in them that look of anxious earnestness which could chase away entirely their old sleepiness.

"You are sure you will not come, Athelston?" inquired Colonel Stuart, preparing to take his seat on the box, confident, before he asked, what the answer would be.

"Quite sure, thank you, Stuart. I shall see you to-morrow. Good-night, Mrs. Esdaile; thank you for—I mean, I'm very glad you chanced to be at the station. Good-night, Miss Chester—good-night."

And Sir Neil turned away, curbing his fierce, strong wish to linger still beside her; to have her under his protection longer; to claim the right of the one who had rescued her from her loneliness and danger. Dull and moody enough he felt as he drove home, in the very fly from The Leopard which had taken himself and Lina on the night when he first met her.

Cold and bleak as the night wind blew, Colonel Stuart faced it from the box-seat of his roomy brougham, leaving his sister to cheer Lina as her gentle, womanly tact and delicacy should prompt, and to say only just those few well-timed words which the girl could bear.

Lina listened gratefully, though she could not trust herself to speak. Here, beside her, was one new compassionate friend. In the warm, peaceful home to which they were taking her Marjorie awaited her—Marjorie, with her generous sympathy and gentle words. Ah, and she had murmured once, not long ago—not long ago, though it seemed like years and years—against Heaven's pity on the desolate!

All Gerard's brave and simple faith was hers just then. Even the dread of that coming trial left her for a little time. Sitting quite silent, her fingers locked in her lap, these thoughts of gratitude were so deeply heart-felt that they crept softly up into the starlit heaven like a prayer.

"Lina," said Marjorie, as the two girls sat before the fire in the pretty little room which had been prepared for Lina, "it's very late—I mean it's exceedingly early; but you are resting nicely on that big chair, aren't you? And I'm resting nicely here, so we won't hurry to separate just this minute. I expected that Mrs. Esdaile would make me promise not to come in here at all to-night, but she didn't, so I shall wait till it strikes one. Wasn't it a kind thought of Colonel—of Adelaide's, to send for me, Lina?"

"Very kind to me."

"You know I didn't mean that," was Marjorie's quick answer. "You know I meant that it was kind to me. Oh, Lina, if we could have helped it, you should not have returned—yet;

but, as you are come, it is so much best for you to be here, and I am glad to be with you. I have missed you sorely through all these long days."

"May I tell you of them?" asked Lina.

Now, Marjorie Castillain, though she looked so thoroughly comfortable and at home, wrapped in her dressing-gown, and with her slippered feet upon the fender, had her whole mind bent on solacing and cheering this solitary girl, and, anxious as she was herself, hid this, that she might succeed the better. She had not misinterpreted the pleading look which Lina had given her when she fancied they were separating for the night—it was seldom that the clear eyes did misinterpret any look of appeal—and her sure, true instinct told her what the mute prayer had been. Lina wanted to tell her where and how these two weeks had been spent. Perhaps, after that, another question—nearer her heart, but farther from her lips—would come more easily.

Yes, truly it did! When Lina had finished her short story—so much more sad and pathetic a one than she fancied—she turned to Marjorie, and asked this question in a whisper, with dry lips and hot, eager eyes,

"Miss Marjorie, what did they say—the magistrates, the sheriff, your sister? What was it? What was said of him? What was the—verdict?"

"The verdict will not be given yet, dear," replied Marjorie, her own face paling; "we have a long, long time to wait for that. Oh, a weary time! If we could only leap through these three months, how willingly would I forfeit them from my life!"

"Perhaps it is better so," whispered Lina, in a voice from which all hope and spirit seemed to have died. "Then, Miss Castillain, is he—oh, *you* say it—where is he?"

"In Bleaborough," said Marjorie, and the effort to speak cheerily was an utter failure now.

"You mean in jail?" was Lina's question, cold and slow in its anguish.

"Colonel Stuart goes to see him often, Lina," continued Marjorie, avoiding the direct answer, "and I'm going when you give me leave."

"Oh no! How could he bear it?" cried Lina, in the same slow voice.

"Bear it!" echoed Marjorie, with a warm, bright flash in her loving eyes. "He would bear it as he bears every thing—nobly, grandly, bravely. Oh, Lina, when I think of him now, my heart feels all hot and wrong and unbelieving! I think of that part of his life, years and years of a horrible, degrading labor, then a struggling existence in that comfortless, almost empty cottage, and now a maddening confinement and inactivity. I think of how he has worked; worked always, always; and never for himself, never for any luxury, or even comfort for himself, worked to clear his name, which was never tainted, and worked for the child whom he rescued from poverty and worse; the child who, sharing all he so hardly earned, has never heard one harsh word from his lips. I think of the woman who made his struggling life so much the harder to endure by her cankering, worrying temper, while all the time he had been the helper and consoler of her own child, and had given love and a home to her forsaken grandson. I think of the—the—of the man (I will say as little against him as I can, because he *may* be dead) to whom he owes this hard and solitary life, whose son it was he guarded, knowing him his son—*his* son! I think of how he worked and lived, Lina, always cheerful, always brave, always hopeful; yet never hearing one word of sympathy or encouragement, never having one loving glance to stimulate his earnest, busy hand. I think of all these things when I lie awake at night; or ride alone—as I've ridden miles and miles lately to baffle Neil in his search for you; or sit alone staring into the fire, where I see it plainest of all; and it makes my heart burn as it never burned before. Every thing seems confused; and—I want," added the girl, with great gentleness, "to tell him how the remembrance of his life has helped me in bearing— Ah, as if *I* had any thing to bear! The tiny clouds that fleck my sky are not troubles, I know it now; and I want to tell him of the one good which his story has taught me, because it was by his wish that it was told me."

"He will say you forget he is a prisoner—and for what," faltered Lina, raising her hands to cover her wide, aching eyes.

"He will not be changed by those prison walls," returned Marjorie, with tearful earnestness. "No four bleak, cruel prison walls could change him. He *must* have the bright bravery in his eyes, and the strong gentleness in his voice. That wretched cell, however wretched, can no more take the manliness from him than could that bare cottage room take from him his inborn gentlemanliness. Lina, you see I know your story now—yours and his; and—and does it pain you to hear that, even to me in my random selfishness, your brother's story has done good?"

Ah, at last the tender words have done their work; for the tears are falling now quite thick and fast from the tired eyes which had been so dry as she told her own tale.

"You know now, dear," resumed Marjorie, "that I have heard your story; but I think I trusted you so thoroughly, and loved you so well before, that I could not do it more. Lina, I promised him to take care of you if the power were ever given me. Colonel Stuart took the message; but I might easily promise what is such a pleasure to me, might not I?"

"I had meant to tell you our story to-night, Miss Castillain," said Lina, when the tears ceased, and she could speak again with calmness.

"And you see it is unnecessary," smiled Marjorie, with a warm, tender clasp about the slight, worn form; "Mr.—your brother—asked Colonel Stuart to tell it me every bit. Colonel Stuart knew who he was always—all through the summer. Did you guess that?"

Lina started.

"He knew!" she echoed, wonderingly; "and he so good to us both, so—*very* good to Gerard."

"He is always good," returned Marjorie, quietly; "but of course he was good when he knew all. He had never believed that first accusation against Gerard. Mr. Esdaile didn't believe it afterward, I understand. Mrs. Esdaile and Clara never had. Clara always loved you dearly, and often and often talked of you to her—husband. Colonel Stuart told me all this himself. Now I suppose I must go. I shall be scolded if I stay longer. Will you go to bed now, and don't think of rising in the morning until you have permission?"

"Miss Castillain," whispered Lina, looking up into her face as she rose, and speaking as if she felt the words a duty, "though Sir Neil *did* bring me back when I longed and prayed to stay, he—he did it very kindly and generously."

"Kindly and generously!" echoed Marjorie, the tone all scornful now, which had just been so soft and pitiful. "I'm sorry to hear he had the power even to do that. I hate to think of any power he has. You don't understand me, I see, but you will, poor child. I never thought of Neil's power until now; I should have laughed the idea to scorn if it had come before me. Now I am beginning to realize the power he does possess in this money-loving, title-worshiping place. Lina, I literally shiver when I think of influence and authority being placed in his lazy, selfish hands; just because he is sheriff of the county, and the Baronet of High Athelston; while, for all we know, the real baronet—oh, I can not talk of that! it makes me skeptical and cross, and all kinds of wrong things. Hush, my dear; don't cry so piteously. You will wear yourself entirely out. Good-night. Look at the time-piece, and promise me you will be in bed by two. Thank you, and so will I. Another kiss. Good-night, dear little friend."

CHAPTER XXXV.

WAITING FOR THE TRIAL.

ANOTHER illness was the forfeit Lina paid for that long day's wandering and anxiety; but tender hands led her back to health again, loving ones, too, though no ties of blood or relationship bound her to these true friends, any more than they had done to that old woman who had nursed her back to life, in the solitary cottage among the hills.

Marjorie was not staying at The Anchorage, "because the old folks at home find life unbearable without me," she told Lina, with the old merriment in her eyes, though they were dim with tears. So every day she went away, taking from the chamber where Lina lay the brightest and the warmest sunbeam which ever found its way thither. Every day, after sitting with Lina as long as she dared, she went away from the house altogether. And Lina found this out, and pondered it a good deal between her own sad thoughts of Gerard; but she never grew to understand it.

"Mrs. Esdaile," Marjorie said, with wistful merriment one morning, as she came in and found her lovingly administering some delicacy to Lina, "I wonder what I should have suffered all this time if I had had my first stupid, involuntary wish, and taken Miss Chester to Hawkedale. I could never have provided dainties for her. Didn't you feel sure of that, when papa told you he had a cook 'just to his mind,' and when Louisa said 'she did pretty well' (that is strong praise for Louie)?"

"Marjorie," inquired Mrs. Esdaile, feeling, as Lina did, the sunniness of the girl's presence, however much she might be shocked by her occasionally heedless words, "how is Louisa now? I don't mean in the matter of general health or culinary opinions, but with regard to her melancholy and her—"

"Her mischief," put in Marjorie, demurely; "I understand. She's pretty well, thank you, in both respects. Louisa, as you may have remarked, has an extraordinary power of condensation. She is succeeding now in condensing into her six-and-twenty years all the mischief which it takes an ordinary woman her whole threescore-and-ten to concoct."

And then the conversation drifted, as it very rarely did, into the one prominent and most serious thought of them all.

"There is no hope, then, of Louisa's relenting?" inquired Mrs. Esdaile, anxiously.

"No hope," was the unwilling reply; "and Neil is as selfish as ever, and Lady Athelston as insanely obstinate as ever; as mildly, as self-punishingly obstinate as ever."

"Still cries, and says how much she has been deceived, eh?" asked Mrs. Esdaile, smiling at Lina. "Quite natural for her, but not the teaching of her better nature, and we will wait until that again is paramount."

So Lina, through those days she spent so quietly in her own room, was not kept in the dark about what was said in the little world round Churchill. But what was told her was told in kindness to herself, as well as by those who never spoke of their own deeds; so that, after all, the greater part was hidden.

She was never told of the hard feeling which prevailed in the place against her brother, or of the unceasing endeavors of Colonel Stuart and Marjorie to change this. She knew that Lady Athelston resented the deceit that had been practiced upon her; but she had never been told what an attack of hysterics had seized her on Sir Neil's proposition that she should go to see Miss Chester, and how her very name was sowing dissension between the mother and son. She knew that Louisa Castillain was angry at her having been received back in Highshire at all; but she was never told of her untiring energy in pursuit of justice for Eustace Jelfrey's murderer; nor of the poisonous seeds of scandal against the murderer's sister, which she sowed broadcast with such pertinacious zeal. She knew that Colonel Stuart was often with Gerard, and used all the influence he possessed in the county in his favor; but she did not know how weak that influence proved, now that the mighty voice of an injured public was raised against the prisoner; and while the high-sheriff published among them his *debonnaire* assurance of the coming sentence.

"It is wearisome work, Adelaide," the colonel would say; "but I will not weary of trying, until it is too late for any effort to avail."

And his sister, smiling in proud confidence, would tell him that only one little turn was wanted, and then the scale of his influence—an influence which every one knew to be good and pure—would weigh this down at once.

"Only one little turn!" he would echo. "But what is to give that little turn, my dear?"

"Truth itself, as Marjorie says," laughed his sister, gently, "clear-seeing, far-seeing, pure-seeing Truth itself."

So Lina, seeing all just in that one ray of sunlight which kind friends let into her room, knew but little, after all, of the verdict uttered already by the busy world without.

When she got better and was able to walk,

Mrs. Esdaile and Marjorie took her away to Torquay; partly to recruit her strength, which was terribly wasted, and partly to strengthen her mental powers, which were oddly dazed and bewildered. Even when Mrs. Esdaile returned to her brother and little son, she left the girls there with a friend of her own; and Marjorie was intensely grateful for this.

"It must have been a joint idea," she said to Lina. "It is too kind a one even for Adelaide to have concocted alone."

And Lina had no need to ask whom she credited with the other half.

Once during the visit, Sir Neil Athelston came down to spend a day there.

"Naturally," remarked Marjorie, when she had read the note he sent to tell her that he was then at the hotel, and ask when he might see her —"naturally he finds the separation from me tedious, unbearable. Poor martyr! Lina, shall I read you my answer? Don't say *No;* I'm one of those small-minded girls who can not exist without reciprocity. Listen:

"'MY DEAR NEIL,—I wish you were at John-o'-Groats or the Land's End—I shouldn't care which. Miss Chester is not well enough to enjoy seeing visitors, and I am too well.—M. C.'

You see," she explained to Lina, raising her laughing eyes, "I had to think of an excuse for both, and so I employed the two opposites. Will that do?"

Lina laughed a little, and Marjorie had accomplished her aim. To lift sometimes the load of pain which was always pressing on the girl's heart was Marjorie's one constant aim.

Sir Neil did call, as Marjorie knew he would. "Unnatural," he said, unconsciously parodying the words of his betrothed, "that we should be separated all this time, and I not allowed to come and see you." But (and this Marjorie had never expected) he did not force his company on her at all, and behaved to Lina with an unobtrusive courtesy which (as Marjorie said to herself) almost amounted to thoughtfulness. And after that one visit, Sir Neil went back to Highshire, and troubled them no more.

"She will grow strong and well with Marjorie," he said to himself; "and I have seen her once again."

"Lina," said Marjorie, her eyes full of fun, "I've sent a message by Neil to ask the old folks at home to send me some spring dresses and money; isn't it a joke? I've told him to send me a sketch of Louie's expression, or papa's, when he gives it. You know they would not vex *him* for all the world, nor provide me with filthy lucre; so won't their inclinations be dislocated? Dear," she added, suddenly, "did you want to send for any thing?"

"No, thank you. Lady Athelston returned me my whole possessions at once," replied Lina, with a pained recollection of the dismissal which the act represented. "I am quite well supplied. I have—in that box she sent—all the money I—I had saved."

"I remember," whispered Marjorie; "saved for Gerard. What a pleasure that must have been, Lina! Oh, if I had a brother who loved me, I—I think I shouldn't mind my financial difficulties!"

And so the sad words ended in a little gentle laugh, as Marjorie tried that all their sad words should.

Colonel Stuart and little Jack came at last to fetch the girls home, and then there dawned that last day before the trial. How suddenly it seemed to come at last, after all the weary sighing for it, and counting the days that had to intervene!

Marjorie had been at The Anchorage all the afternoon, and the shabby phaeton had been sent for her. Then, in the darkness of the March night, James drove her away from the bright and happy home, where her thoughts still lingered.

"Marjorie, I thought I should see you. I have waited for you. Take my horse on, James, and I will drive your mistress."

It was Sir Neil Athelston who greeted her thus, at the gate of The Anchorage, and who took his seat beside her, with his old ease and air of proprietorship.

"Let the old pony go as slowly as you like, Neil," she said, absently; "there is nothing very cheering awaiting me at home; and it is a very dismal morrow that will dawn upon this gusty night."

"I'm more than willing, dear," said Neil, taking the pony as sleepily as possible along the dark highway. "How is—how are they all, Marjorie?"

"Mrs. Esdaile has had toothache for a few hours," returned the girl, with her old enjoyment of misunderstanding and provoking him, "but, fortunately, it is better now. Little Jack cut his finger about a week ago; but—don't you grow anxious about it?—under a strict diachylon *régime*, it has healed sufficiently for him to finish, with ease, a copy which I set him: 'Learning strengthens, refines, and elevates the mind.' But the cook is lying down with headache; caused, I fancy, by—"

"I don't want to hear about the servants," put in Neil, petulantly.

"I was just coming to the colonel when you interrupted me. He has not, that I know of, called in professional advice; so I hope—"

"Bother!" growled the young man, without a smile. "I've seen Stuart to-day. Never mind telling me about him, Marjorie."

"You asked about them all," was the girl's calm rejoinder, "and so I began to tell you."

"How is Miss Chester?" he inquired, knowing quite well that she had read his thoughts from the first; and so attempting no more roundabout methods of reaching the truth.

"How can you expect her to be?"

Something in her voice, it must have been, which made his next words almost apologetic as well as regretful.

"I'm very sorry she's subpœnaed for to-morrow, Marjorie. No one could be more sorry than I am."

"I'm sorry you were the cause of it," she answered, coldly. "Perhaps her coming back could not possibly have been prevented; but your bringing her could, and would have been, if you had had ever so little thought for *her* unmixed with thought for yourself."

"It would have made this difference," said Neil, a great wrath rising in his heart as he felt how daringly Marjorie put motives on his conduct which he never had the power of contradicting; "that she would have been left to starve and die—or worse—alone in London. She, with

her beauty and helplessness and poverty! Can you calmly think of it, Marjorie—you, a tender-hearted woman?"

"I suppose we never shall be able to put ourselves in each other's places," smiled Marjorie, looking into his face frankly and kindly for the first time for many months, "else, I suppose, Neil, I should not think quite the same of your part in this. I wish I could. I can not bear to go on thinking of you as selfish and cruel."

"Thank you," he answered, in a voice of pain, not irony. "Even without the power of putting myself in your place, I can appreciate fully all the goodness of your acts, Marjorie dear. *You* have always been good to her."

"It was not goodness," the girl answered, almost sadly; "perhaps it was as much selfishness as yours. All I do, or could do, for her she deserves from me, for the lessons she has been unconsciously teaching me."

"But I may thank you, mayn't I?" the young man asked, turning to her earnestly as they drove down between the great old limes of Hawkedale, weird-looking in the light of the passing lamps, "because she has been, as it were, under our protection — my mother's and mine — and ours ought to have been the home to shelter her now."

"Better as it is," said the girl, curtly, her eyes aflame at his last lame speech, "better for her, better for us, better for you."

"But I must do something."

"Of course," returned Marjorie, coldly, "your protection is indispensable; you always felt that. Just wait till to-morrow is over, then claim your privilege. If the brother is condemned, surely it will be a consolation to the sister to feel that the high-sheriff is more merciful than the judge, and offers *her*, at any rate, an entire absolution."

"Don't be sarcastic to-night, Marjorie," pleaded Sir Neil, with an earnestness which was foreign to his usually lazy tones; "I am as miserable as she is herself. You win all her gratitude, I all her contempt. I own it is natural, but still it is rather less easy to bear than you can imagine. Where — where you wish to please, it is hard to find that you always hurt."

"Neil," inquired Marjorie, abruptly, "how long is your mother going to persist in her inveterate anger against Miss Chester?"

"I don't know," he said, and as he spoke the lamp-light showed a real anxiety on the face she had always known so careless; "I have told you again and again that I think *you* could convince her, if you would try."

"I won't go to her again to try," was the quick answer. "I said I would not until the trial was over, and I will not. She was unpersuadable and hard and dogmatic in her arguments, as only a woman can be. I said I wouldn't encourage her again to say things that put me in a passion, and made her bellow—oh yes, she did bellow, Neil; don't interrupt. So I've never been but that once, and I don't intend to plead for Miss Chester again, until to-morrow is over. Surely the horrible farce can not last longer than one day."

"You never break your word, Marjorie; so it is of no use asking you."

"No use, Neil," she interrupted, impetuously; "but oh, I do break my word; I've broken it a hundred times since" (she checked herself hurriedly)—"since I made even that one resolution. But I have not broken it in that. I will not stoop again to Lady Athelston. Miss Chester can live without your mother as well as without my sister. Let them go."

"Polite," smiled Neil. "But do you change your opinions, if you do not break your word, or do you still think—"

"I still think every thing I used to think," the girl answered, hastily; "I still think I would give all I have (though that isn't much) if you and I hadn't been so idiotic as to go into the rectory study that day with Louisa. Oh, if I had but been miles away! It seems that every body is to be able to tell something to help on that one story, and is to be made to do it, too! And foremost of all, Neil, I still think Eustace Jelfrey is not dead."

"Ah, Marjorie," he said, gently, "the very way you say it betrays how weak your belief really is. You have no confidence in your own opinion. No; the impossibility of such an idea must be patent to us all by now."

"Good-night," she struck in, abruptly: "don't come in. I don't want to hear Louisa talk about to-morrow, and I don't want to talk about to-day. I have fancied all day that I could hear the Bleaborough bells and the trumpets—deafening farce! Good-night."

She stood upon the steps, looking after him as he rode away.

"Poor Neil!" she said to herself, with a smile and a sigh together, "will any thing ever teach him how to act in real, noble self-forgetfulness? I feel so often maddened by him, yet never hopeless. The idea of Lady Athelston's old fallacy that *I* do him good! I—think of it! I wonder what good I could ever do any one, even if I loved them, and I suppose that is the motive-power most wanted. If I loved Neil, should I be less miserable to-night than I am, or more so? I wonder. And if I loved—"

Even the unbreathed thought was not finished. Standing there in the hush and darkness of the night — standing there alone and unseen — the color yet rose slowly and vividly in Marjorie's cheeks; and, knowing what thought had summoned it, she put up both her hands to hide it, sobbing as she never sobbed when any eyes could see, or ears could hear her.

And Neil went slowly on his way back to High Athelston, thinking, more than he imagined, about the girl who had dismissed him so suddenly; but for such thoughts she might have been glad and grateful in her heart.

"I, too, wish that to-morrow were over," he said to himself, as the gates of High Athelston were locked behind him, "or that they had picked Burton for high-sheriff instead of me. Yet I don't know why I mind," he added, almost savagely, as he cantered on. "A nice thing if the laws are to be broken, and life taken with impunity, under our very eyes!"

And a few minutes afterward he was listening, half amused and half indifferent, to the rehearsal of the pageant which was to go from High Athelston on the morrow.

"We had to-day the best show there's been in Bleaborough since last an Athelston was high-sheriff," the servant said, as the baronet turned away; "yet he doesn't seem to care about it. I thought he wasn't going to give the orders at all for to-morrow."

"My lady was waiting up to see Sir Neil, if he would be good enough to step into her dressing-room."

He *was* good enough to step into her dressing-room; and there he saw her, sitting fretfully beside the fire, chafing at his delay, and at Fletcher's awkwardness, and at a fancied accumulation of minor miseries.

"It was never so when Miss Chester was here," thought Neil, the long, lazy eyes taking their intent brightness even at this momentary thought of Lina, and the thought giving him patience enough to listen in silence for ten minutes to Lady Athelston's complaints. But when these all resolved into one tearful, injured complaint of the companion in whom she had "blindly trusted," and been "basely deceived," he spoke, rousing himself from his indolence.

"Was this all you had to say, mother?"

"No; I wanted to speak about to-morrow," she whined, taking his hint; "I must have Marjorie to go with me. You can not sit with me in the court, and so I must have Marjorie."

"You quite intend to go, then?"

"Of course I intend to go. Of course it is my duty to go," she said, querulously, "you high-sheriff, and—and the trial affecting one who has been in our service. Of course I must go, but I can not go without Marjorie."

Marjorie's prolonged coolness and absence from High Athelston had worried Lady Athelston more than she would have told, and to go without Marjorie into the crowded town and court to-morrow was more than she could have attempted. Why, people might actually say that the match between her son and Miss Castillain was broken off, or something equally absurd and untrue; and no one knew what harm might come of such reports with such a girl as Marjorie, whose freaks no one could so much as pretend to understand.

"Marjorie told me she would go with you, mother," said Neil, speaking into the uplifted trumpet, "and I promised that you would drive round for her. Louisa is going with the Burtons, she hopes; she finds them kindred spirits more than ever now."

Lady Athelston breathed freely again. Her mind was set at rest on its most anxious point; a great load (for her who had no loads to bear but those of her own raising) had been lifted, and she could afford to be a little harmlessly vicious now—a grand resource of the selfish when their own personal plans have taken a favorable turn, and relieved them from any pressing anxiety.

"I shouldn't think of going without Marjorie, Neil," she said, in a melancholy tone of resignation; "but it will be very painful in any case."

Neil shivered in anticipation of the inevitable, unsubdued sobbing to which she was accustoming him. "I don't know how I shall bear to look at that deceitful girl, who let me confide in her, and pretended—"

"For Heaven's sake, mother, don't be a fool!" spoke Neil, angrily. "If you don't care about Miss Chester, what's the use of crying over her, and making such a ridiculous scene? If you do care about her, what's the use of calling her names?"

He rose as he spoke, and walked away, thinking *again how much more* smoothly life had passed, and how much more bright the great house had felt, when Lina Chester's beautiful face and dainty figure were to be met about it. Ah, how wan and hopeless was the beautiful face just then; how drooping and tired the dainty figure!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE NIGHT BEFORE.

That afternoon, while Marjorie was at The Anchorage, Louisa Castillain, entering the drawing-room in her walking-dress, rang impatiently for tea.

"Bring it at once," she said to the antiquated butler who answered her summons—"for myself alone. It is no use waiting for Miss Marjorie, and I am in a hurry to go—into the town."

The hesitation was not caused by Louisa's unwillingness to utter the falsehood, only by her being unprepared with it.

"I think James has orders to fetch Miss Marjorie from The Anchorage at nine, ma'am," said the old man. "She walked there this afternoon, but he was to take the phaeton to-night."

"Tell James," put in Miss Castillain, as if Miss Marjorie's orders were matters too small to interest her, "to have the phaeton ready for me in ten minutes."

"Will you return for dinner, ma'am?" inquired the butler, with the air of wishing to know what covers to lay, but with the real design of making sure that the carriage would be at liberty for Miss Marjorie, as she wished.

"I ordered dinner for two, did I not?" returned Miss Castillain, carelessly; "your master and myself. Now, do not delay with my tea."

During the few minutes that intervened between the man's dismissal and his return with the tray, Louisa paced to and fro upon the worn old hearth-rug, looking a model of petulant impatience. But when, beside her cup, she caught sight of a small note addressed to herself, her whole face brightened.

"When did this come?" she inquired, as she took it up.

"Now, ma'am, as I was coming in. The footman did not wait, as there was no answer."

Something in the few lines Lady Helen Burton had written to her friend gave that friend an extra relish for her tea. She read the note over three or four times, before she slowly folded the coroneted sheet and replaced it in its envelope; and, while she did so, a smile, pleased and congratulatory, though somewhat sinister, played round her small, well-shaped lips.

"*That* is all right," she muttered, as she rose and drew on her gloves, standing before the glass, and regarding complacently her high black hat and fair, handsome face; "that is all right, so far."

"What brought one of the Burton Park servants here, Louisa?" inquired her father, in his sharp, abrupt voice, as he entered the room. "Has the earl sent me a message, as he could not be in Bleaborough to-day, or is it only some rubbish between yourself and Lady Helen?"

"Helen mentions neither her father nor mother," returned Louisa; "she only writes to me about to-morrow. The earl and countess are not going into Bleaborough for the trial, so Helen

writes to say that I must drive with her and her brother, and they will come round here for me. I had hoped so."

"That's right," put in Mr. Castillain, rubbing his hands; "I don't wish to have out the britzska; it will want repairing soon, if we use it much now. Marjorie is sure to go with the Athelstons, and I ride."

"How early you came home, papa!" remarked Louisa, lingering a little to hear what he had to say. "I fancied you would stay to dine with the judges."

"Not very likely, when I went in on horseback, and took no dress; besides, I had work I wanted to overlook here. I shall have my hands full for the next two hours."

"And was it a pleasant sort of day?" inquired Miss Castillain, with inquisitive enjoyment; "and did the bells ring madly? The Bleaborough bells are so beautiful, and I haven't heard them for so long! And what sort of a man is the judge who will try the criminal cases?"

"Much the same as other judges," returned Mr. Castillain, curtly.

"And had Sir Neil four horses to his own carriage? And did he and Mr. Jorden drive with the judges? And how did it all look?"

"Much as it has looked as long as I can remember," was the answer, "except that Athelston is more of a fool than most high-sheriffs, and makes a greater parade."

"His full-dress liveries are gorgeous; aren't they, papa?"

"Don't get excited about it," her father answered, chillily; "other Athelstons have been fools before him; they always turn out their men like royalty. Rubbish it is! He has a fine troop of servants, though, and as handsomely mounted a set of tenants as one need see."

"And did many personal friends attend, papa?"

"Plenty, both in carriages and on horseback. What! you stick to this nonsense, do you?" he added, looking crossly down upon the tea equipage. "I really think, Louisa, that you might dispense with such extravagance as that; and a fire, too, on this warm day!"

"Helen says, papa," put in Louisa, dutifully turning aside his remark, while the March wind shook the casement, "that her brother declares there is not the slightest chance of the verdict to-morrow being any thing but guilty."

"We know that, without her information," retorted the old gentleman, testily. "When a murder—or manslaughter, if you choose—is witnessed, what doubt can there be of the verdict of twelve sensible men?"

"Of whom you are one," smiled Louisa. "Papa, I should like to be on the grand jury."

"Should you? I doubt whether the other eleven would care about it. But there's nothing curious in the viscount's considering the verdict settled. Bless me, what news is that? Where are you going?"

"To High Athelston, papa," replied Louisa, hastening away now, for fear of further questioning. "I shall be back in time for dinner. I never keep you waiting, do I? I leave that for Marjorie."

"Drive me up Nether Lane, to the private entrance into Athelston Park," was Louisa's order to the coachman, "and leave me there. I *intend to walk home.*"

From the green door in the high gray wall, James turned the old pony, and drove straight to The Anchorage. He might just as well stay there, he thought, until Miss Marjorie was ready. It was a pleasant place to stay at, as all the Hawkedale servants knew.

But James and the phaeton were no sooner safely out of Miss Castillain's sight than she followed them, slowly and cautiously, without having entered the park at all.

Down the lane, between the overarching elms, she loitered until she reached the two cottages standing together; then she turned in at Mrs. Cheere's gate, and walked up the garden with a tired, languid step. Dorcas slowly opened the door upon her.

"I want to ask you to allow me to rest a few minutes," began Louisa, in her most insinuating tones. "I persisted in walking from High Athelston, and I feel quite tired already."

"'Tisn't far, either," put in Mrs. Cheere, rather icily.

"Not very far, as you say," returned Louisa, forcing a conciliatory smile, "but I suppose I am out of practice for walking any distance. I declined to drive home, and now I repent my obstinacy."

"Obstinate people aren't those that generally repent most, either. Will you sit down, Miss Castillain?"

That sounded quite gracious from Dorcas, and Louisa glanced at her with a similar graciousness, but she saw no unbending of the woman's normal rigidity.

"I see you have Mr. Spendir's boy with you still, Mrs. Cheere," she said, glancing to where Jet stood quietly washing up the tea-things while Dorcas dried them. "How kind it is of you to keep him still!"

Louisa emphasized the "still" pleasantly and admiringly; but she knew, as well as Marjorie did, the whole story of Mrs. Cheere's connection with the child, and the child's claim upon her.

"Yes, at present," returned Dorcas, shortly.

"Poor Lady Athelston is very much distressed about this trial to-morrow," began Miss Castillain, conjecturing that her listener's attention would immediately be won by mention of that lady's name.

But Dorcas stolidly awaited further information, and at present vouchsafed no remark.

"It is a most distressing thing," continued Louisa, "for one in her position to have been subjected to such an imposture, and to have to be now associated by name with such a person as Miss Chester must be."

"Very distressing," assented Dorcas, quite promptly now.

"And connected — through her—" continued Miss Castillain, greatly encouraged, "with a criminal."

"Mr. Spendir?" inquired Dorcas, with liveliness. "Yes, but my lady, nor none of us, won't be troubled long with *him*."

Keen and searching was Miss Castillain's glance into the woman's face, then her lips rippled into a satisfied smile.

"Even your evidence would insure that, would it not, Mrs. Cheere?" she asked, plausibly. "But I, too, think it a privilege to be instrumental in bringing such a criminal to justice, and freeing nervous people from being imposed upon or terrified."

"It's our duty to tell the truth," remarked Dorcas, stonily; "of course we like to do it, and to punish any criminal we've been unfortunate enough to be living near for a time."

"I fancy that the words you and Mr. Jelfrey overheard would be quite as effectual in proving him guilty as my witnessing the crime itself," Louisa said, placidly; "at any rate, Mrs. Cheere, I look upon you as the one who will most nearly share with me the task of exposing guilt. I am so glad to know that you look upon this task in the same light as that in which I myself see it. I know you do, Mrs. Cheere?"

The words were put as a question, graciously and rather flatteringly, and Dorcas answered them, though with a curt acidity.

"I'm glad enough to tell the truth. I'm not going to say any thing but the truth. No fear, Miss Castillain; it isn't my custom. Didn't I direct the police to him myself, and tell them all I had heard him say—every thing? So, even if I'd a wish to eat my words, I couldn't, after that; at least, it wouldn't be any use trying. I've not lived near that man for six months for nothing, and I'll—I'll tell the truth of him, whether it brings him to the gallows or not. I shall be on my oath, as many of us will, and it isn't very likely I'd perjure myself for such as he."

"Indeed, no one could ever dream of your doing that," said Louisa, eagerly; "no one would ever dream it of you, any more than of me, Mrs. Cheere. But I must really go, pleasant as it is to rest here. I can not indulge myself any longer."

Louisa rose, making her adieus—as Marjorie would have said, "with painful gush."

"The poor little boy, too," she remarked, with gentle commiseration; "his evidence would be almost sufficient without ours, would it not? And the other child's, too; I'm very sorry for them both."

"They're young to come forward in a court of justice," remarked Dorcas, stiffly; "still, it can't harm them. Are you rested, Miss Castillain?"

"Oh yes, thank you," smiled Louisa, "very much rested; and I may meet the carriage from home, perhaps. Good-evening, Mrs. Cheere."

Relieved of an anxiety which had been worrying her more than she would have cared to acknowledge, Louisa tripped along the lane, while Dorcas turned silently to resume her washing.

Jet tried to feel his way to a little conversation, less to relieve the monotony of his occupation than to hide from Mrs. Cheere the two great globular tears which had risen to his eyes as he listened to Miss Castillain.

"Didn't she look ill when she first came in?" he asked, as he deftly put the plates into a heap.

"She looked," said Dorcas, conclusively, working a little faster than usual, and, if possible, more grimly, "as if she'd been boiled and put away to eat cold; that's how she looked when she first came in. Now, put those things up, child, and don't chatter any more."

So the pair went on in silence with their small duties, while Louisa walked gayly and hastily on to Hawkedale, and was in good time to take her place at the head of her father's table. It was not either a sumptuous or cheerful table, but Louisa was not aware of any deficiency, and Mr. Castillain apparently enjoyed his haricot as much as he could possibly have enjoyed the varied repast which he might have shared, in Bleaborough, with the judges and his county neighbors.

The father and daughter were still sitting over their wine—it was the very mildest sherry, but Louisa would not on any consideration have foregone her languid enjoyment of it—when Marjorie came home, her face unusually pale.

"Did Athelston reach The Anchorage before you left?" inquired her father.

"No."

"He told me he should leave the town as early as he could, and that he wanted to see Mrs. Esdaile. Then you haven't seen him?"

This was a different question.

"Yes, I've seen him, papa."

"And what did he say?"

"A variety of interesting things," returned the girl, flushing nervously.

"I've no doubt," said the old gentleman, with a laugh which testified to his real enjoyment of the idea, but which made Marjorie wince; "I've no doubt of it. I don't wish to probe into your affectionate secrets; I only mean, what did he say about the dinner?"

"I think he had forgotten it," replied Marjorie, her lips twitching a little at the corners.

"What did he say about to-morrow?" put in Louisa. "Will it be a trying day to him, as well as to us all? Horrible it is," she sighed, "to be mixed up in such an affair—a most degrading thing for us Castillains."

"Otherwise immaculate." (It was Marjorie who capped the speech so promptly.) "We come of a splendid old stock, don't we, Louie? But we are rather a sort of potato crop, the best part of us is under-ground. I believe there were some Castillains worth picking up in the last century."

"Don't hesitate about insulting *me*, Marjorie," spoke her sister, resignedly; "but I think you might stop and consider before you insult your own father. It will be well, I'm sure, when this trial is over, for your temper has been getting more and more unbearable every month since that man was taken up. After to-morrow, perhaps, we shall have a little peace. You can not excite yourself about a condemned criminal."

"If—"

The word came involuntarily from Marjorie's lips; then she paused in sudden consciousness of how little her sister would understand the speech she had begun. "There's no 'if' in the case," laughed Louisa, "every one says it. You know that Neil says the same, only you will not acknowledge it."

"What's the use of trial by jury, if every ignoramus knows the verdict beforehand?" asked the younger sister, angrily. "Besides, I may say 'if,' if I like, a dozen, and a hundred times. I like 'if.' I say, with Touchstone, 'Much virtue in if!'"

"Papa says," persisted Louisa, with a smile, "that by this time to-morrow there won't be a dissentient voice about the man's guilt."

"How can there be," inquired Mr. Castillain, conclusively, "when it is the truth; and plenty of clever men are here to disclose and sift and pronounce that truth?"

"But even clever men, papa, ever so clever," said Marjorie, gently, "may construe a thing in utterly different ways, either by chance or will."

"There's no fear of things being construed unfairly, at any rate," interposed the elder sister, as she rose from her chair. "The counsel—not to speak of the judge and jury—will see this whole thing in a moment. Rest satisfied with that, Marjorie, my dear."

"Don't put me down as if I were a baby," exclaimed the girl, rising too, her eyes flashing passionately. "I have different ideas of justice from you. I'm thankful to say so. Be quiet."

Louisa smiled compassionately. "I hope your behavior will be a little improved when this man's last degradation is over," she said, as she left the room.

"It won't be any degradation," cried the younger girl, with a stamp of her foot, and a hot color flaming in her cheeks. "That trial tomorrow won't be a bit of degradation. Shakspeare knew better than you do, and he says it's the heretic that *makes* the fire, not he that burns in it. Don't talk any more to me."

"You are a little goose, Marjorie," put in her father, pettishly. "Run away to your tea, and leave these matters to the lawyers."

"I could almost say, papa," the girl said, hesitating still with him, in her unwillingness to join her sister, and looking into his face with eyes half defiant and half wistful; "I could quite say with Cade—wasn't it?—'The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.'"

Mr. Castillain laughed his short, grating laugh, but all he said was, "That shows how unsteady all your confidence is, child; and I advise you not to begin making these random speeches to Athelston."

On her way to the drawing-room, Marjorie stopped before the great carved oak clock in the hall. A long while she stood, and the steps that passed (as the old butler went to and fro) never roused her.

"Twelve hours more before day begins," she whispered to herself, at last, as she turned away, "and then the vast, immense day itself; and then— But I think almost any thing on earth is easier to bear than doubt."

That last day of suspense was dying in its midnight hush.

At Hawkedale, Louisa Castillain was sleeping the untroubled sleep of the innocent; while Marjorie (tossing wakefully upon her pillows) still tried to think that thought she had so often whispered to herself, that any thing was easier to bear than doubt—forgetting how doubt is the shadow of hope itself.

At High Athelston, Lady Athelston had fallen asleep placidly, in the consciousness that she should have Marjorie to lean upon on the morrow—Marjorie, who (she tried to believe) had always been a better prop for her than the girl on whom she had relied for a time so blindly. While Neil, sitting moodily before his fire, chafed impatiently at one thought only, the sorest thought of all to his proud, high-bred nature. Could he bear to see the beautiful, delicate, timid girl he loved exposed upon the morrow to the broad gaze, and free remarks, and coarse suspicions of a crowded court, with no one near her who had the right to support, or help, or encourage her? Could he bear to see the pain upon her face, and the fear? Could he bear it, if her evidence helped to bring in the damning verdict which so surely must be brought? Could he bear it, knowing that he—the reigning baronet of High Athelston—had chosen this girl to love, and must even choose to love her still, through all this degradation?

At the cottage in Nether Lane, Jet lay crying quietly upon his small, wet pillow; trying hard to suppress his sobs, for fear of their being heard and objected to in the next room—in the next room, where Dorcas, with her hard hands tight upon her face, knelt in the darkness.

At The Anchorage, Colonel Stuart sat writing fast, and thoroughly engrossed. Little Jack had cried himself to sleep in his soft white bed; and from one window, Lina Chester looked out into the thick darkness of the March night, seeing—as she always fancied she saw in light and darkness, by day or night, as it had been five years before—one prison cell; and her hands ached in the anguish of their clasp, as she pictured the change which these slow months had wrought in the dauntless heart and the brave face she loved so dearly.

And so around them all deepened the silence and the darkness of that night upon which was to dawn the day of Gerard's trial.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?

The Bleaborough Assize Court had not been so crowded since an assize nearly twenty years before, when a murderer (now standing in pale and ferocious effigy at Madame Tussaud's) was tried for a crime which made all England ring with execration upon his name. By ten o'clock there was left no standing-space throughout the whole building, save where it had been specially reserved.

There were two or three reasons why this trial should excite so much attention; chief among them the fact of the prisoner being no common man ("an artist and a gentleman," it was said), and of so many distinguished people being mixed up in the affair. Bleaborough was not often favored with the trial of a *gentleman*, either for willful murder or manslaughter, where the witnesses nearly all belonged to the county families, and where even the high-sheriff was himself served with a subpœna; so Bleaborough might well be excused for exciting itself unusually, and for crushing itself indefatigably in its untiring efforts to obtain seats in the criminal court.

Down from the jail, through the swaying crowd, came the close van, with its barred window and its guard of police; and suggestive jests were hurled jauntily at its invisible occupants, as it turned under the archway at the back of the Assize Court.

And presently, round to the front entrance, drove the sheriff's splendid carriage, and the burly, scarlet-robed figure of the judge issued therefrom into the midst of obsequious servants and officials. He and the sheriff entered the court together, and to both of them the room seemed already a mass of restless faces.

Sir Neil's eyes ranged along the crowded gallery and about the building, intent and anxious. Where was she? He saw her at last, sitting beside Mrs. Esdaile, near the witnesses, but it was

many minutes before he could bear to look into her face after he had discovered her. Cool and self-satisfied as he seemed in his dignity, his heart thumped heavily when he saw her, sitting bowed and pale, her eyes fixed upon her brother's face, so sadly hopeless and piteous in their gaze, and filled with such great yearning and great love.

Neil gazed from her to Mrs. Esdaile, almost appealingly, and the watchful, careful tenderness of that lady's face and manner gave him a feeling as nearly approaching to gratitude as were any of the feelings to which he was accustomed. Then he gave a glance into the face of the man who stood alone in the railed-off space nearly in the centre of the court. One glance only, and his lips curled; though something that felt like pity began even then to stir his heart.

He an Athelston! Standing there, a prisoner at the bar, to answer for the deadliest crime a man can commit; he to call himself an Athelston! How scornfully this crowd would jeer, if they could know whose name this murderer claimed!

Neil started, finding that he was losing the address for the prosecution. Yes, he had entirely lost the opening. The prisoner had been banned as a forger, and as a convict returned with a ticket of leave nearly two years before. Every thing suspicious in his previous life had been related in its worst aspect, before the sheriff's attention was won entirely to the case. Then he listened, moodily and contemptuously, while the prisoner's guilt was made evident; terribly evident to the dullest comprehension in the court, as guilt can be made by a barrister only; and all the time, he was watching intently the listening faces.

Seated together in the best position in the court were Lady Athelston and Marjorie. Marjorie's head was not bowed like Lina's, nor were her eyes fixed yearningly upon the prisoner; yet there was something in the girls' faces which made them strangely alike to Neil, though the touch of sympathy which would have explained the likeness to him he could not understand.

A very tiresome companion was Lady Athelston to the girl beside her; she perpetually wanted to be enlightened on some particular point (rendered impossible by her deafness), got terribly excited when Louisa Castillain appeared in the witness-box, and gave promise at last of an irrepressible attack of hysterics. Marjorie was struck with a new idea to quiet her. She wrote a few words rapidly on her tablets, and passed them on. They were:

"Neil is looking angrily across at us. He means that we are not to talk or make a sensation; we will discuss it all quietly at home afterward."

Lady Athelston nodded assent to this, and sat quite still, silenced by the wholesome awe of her son's displeasure, looking admiringly over to where he sat, with folded arms and contemptuous lips, as he listened to Miss Castillain's evidence, so coldly, clearly, and circumstantially given. Marjorie listened too, her eyes dark with passion, and the brows drawn down close above them.

Colonel Stuart sat with his head leaning on his hand, and never once looked up. Jack Esdaile stood beside his uncle, listening eagerly, while his breathing grew quick and irregular. Louisa had nearly reached the end of her long, unhurried narrative; had described vividly the murder she had witnessed in the valley, when the prisoner had deliberately flung deceased into the mine, and then fled; and was just volunteering the information that the woman who had for many months lived next door to the prisoner, had, some time before, overheard him threaten to kill deceased, when there was a slight commotion in the court—only a slight one, half contemptuous, half pitiful.

"Nothing, my lord, except that the prisoner's boy has fallen forward in a swoon."

"The crush and heat, of course. Take him out into the air," some one said; but the woman who sat beside him raised him coolly, and settled his head against her shoulder.

"He's as well here as he'll be outside," she said, taking no further notice. "It had nothing to do with the crush and heat."

Upon the little resting figure and ashy white face the prisoner's eyes were fixed with anxious tenderness. Marjorie, burning, and even trembling, with shame and anger as she listened to her sister's narration, saw this, and hid her own face from the crowd. Then little Jack Esdaile was taken to the witness-box, and he told the facts almost exactly as Miss Castillain had told them; only that somehow the words seemed all different as they passed his twitching, sorrowful lips.

"I didn't like Mr. Jelfrey, although he was my tutor," spoke the boy, in an unexpected and unorthodox burst of confidence; "and I did like Mr. Spendir very, very much. He was always kind and good to us boys. Mr. Jelfrey was always hard and disagreeable to us, unless grown-up people were by."

Jack was here given to understand that his opinions on the subject had not been requested; and, blushing hotly in his confusion, he rejoined Colonel Stuart.

"Have I done very badly, Uncle Alick?" he whispered, anxiously.

"You have done all you could, I suppose, Jack," was the answer. "I have but little hope, though."

"Marjorie, Marjorie, who is this?—who is this next witness?"

Lady Athelston was leaning forward on her seat, in an attitude of attention which the knowledge of her deafness made it rather piteous to see. Marjorie wrote down Jet's name, not trusting herself even to raise her eyes, which were bright and excited now behind their gathering tears.

A slight, sympathetic motion again in the crowded court, as the child was taken to the witness-box; so ill he looked, so cowed and really terrified. He repeated the oath slowly, then kissed the book with stiff, white lips.

Yes, he had been in the valley in the afternoon of the 12th of November. He supposed it was the 12th he meant. He was with Miss Castillain and Master Esdaile; Miss Castillain had met them just before, and turned with them to go home together. He had seen—by the pool—

The words, each an agonized whisper, here broke off entirely, and the rest was wrung from him by questioning.

Yes, he had seen the prisoner fling the deceased into the pool. "I only thought it was a pool," volunteered the child, with a flash of sudden, nervous courage, "and dad only thought it was

a pool. We didn't know about a mine." Yes, he saw Miss Chester run toward prisoner—the questions helped him on again now that the short-lived courage had died in its sudden flash—she looked terrified. She seemed as if she was going to stop him, but she was too late. No; prisoner had not seen any of them, he was quite sure; he had not even seen Miss Chester, who had run toward him. She fell down when deceased was thrown into the water, and Miss Castillain had ridden away very fast, and then they two had followed and ridden straight to The Anchorage.

After this, there was a strict cross-examination for the child to undergo; and then, before he left his place, the prisoner was asked if he wished to question this witness. No, he had no need to do so, he answered, gazing for a long minute into the face of the frightened child with just that old tenderness in his eyes which made them so warmly beautiful.

Mr. Jorden was examined next, and then his daughter; and their evidence only confirmed entirely, as far as it went, the deposition of Louisa Castillain. And so, indeed, did Sir Neil Athelston's when he took Miss Jorden's place; only that he added (with an easy, intent glance into Fitz Spendir's face) that he had reason to know that deceased ("Ah," thought Marjorie, "if they would only find other names now!") hated the prisoner, and wished him out of the country. Evidently Sir Neil Athelston felt that his opinion had its weight; but no other words did he vouchsafe, either in favor of the criminal, or in disparagement of the man who was spoken of as dead.

"I have known the prisoner intimately for a year"—it was Colonel Stuart who was speaking now, and after his simple testimony as to the correctness of the preceding statements, his grave, clear tones carried a strange force with them, simple and incisive—"and I have learned to respect him thoroughly. During all that time, he has worked hard, executing orders for myself and a few of my friends round Churchill, and most of the money which he earned he has been putting by toward paying off what he considered a debt to my sister's husband; that sum for which the learned prosecutor says Mr. Esdaile's name was forged five years ago, the sum for which deceased, I have now reason to believe, drew a check which, by a plausible lie, he induced the prisoner to cash. I have known Gerard Dymocke, through my late wife's memory, for six years; and, besides this, by my own personal knowledge I have proved him to be an honorable man, in the very highest and deepest sense of the word. He spent last summer in hard, incessant work, doing no act, even saying no word, which could injure the man who had destroyed his prospects and his good name. When the two men met, on the day that the last, if not the greatest, insult had been offered from the prosperous man to the struggling and suffering one—met alone in the solitude—was it wonderful that they should fight, as men do fight after an injury, gaining generally credit rather than blame? And as they chanced to meet on the brink of that water, of the treachery of which prisoner knew nothing, was it natural that he should go out of his way to avoid being near it? Was the circumstance of his going straight home from the lake a sign that he felt he had deliberately committed a deed for which he could be *lawfully punished with death?*"

This Colonel Stuart asked with a simple, straightforward earnestness which had its full weight; yet, after all, was but little to weigh against the testimony of those who had seen the deed perpetrated.

"Marjorie, Marjorie, how absent you seem!" fretted Lady Athelston, in a whisper. "Is Colonel Stuart's evidence helping to hang that poor creature?"

"Hush!" cried the girl, in a sharp, pained whisper, of which her companion was happily unconscious.

"Oh, Marjorie, I'm afraid you have to go now," whined Lady Athelston. "Make haste, my dear, back to me. Don't stay to say much. I shall be so nervous."

Marjorie, as she rose, gave a smile down into the weak, pleading face; but it was not like Marjorie's brilliant smile: it was cold and sad and tired.

And now Marjorie stood in the witness-box, with hundreds of eyes upon her, and hundreds of ears waiting for her version of this story, waiting for her to indorse or confute her sister's statement.

But Marjorie had evidently as little intention of doing the one as she had power of doing the other.

"I happened to call at Churchill Rectory on the afternoon of the 12th of November," she said, after having quietly taken her oath, "and was there when my sister rode from the valley to obtain help for Mr. Jelfrey. She told us then—Mr. Jorden and his daughter, Colonel Stuart, Sir Neil Athelston, and myself—in substance—exactly what she has told in court to-day.

"I had known Mr. Eustace Jelfrey for two years before that date," Marjorie said, when questioned of all she knew about prisoner's connection with deceased, "and I disliked and mistrusted him through all that time. He had missed no opportunity of insulting, annoying, and threatening Mr. Spendir ever since Mr. Spendir first settled in Highshire; and, to my knowledge, Mr. Jelfrey practiced deceit upon us all; for never, until his disappearance, was it known among us that he was a married man when he came to The Anchorage. I do not believe Mr. Jelfrey is dead. He was, as he has often told us, an expert and able swimmer—he used to boast of it—and I know him well enough to be sure that, if by seeming dead he could injure Mr. Spendir, the seeming would come very easily to him."

This Marjorie said, speaking in sharp, clear sentences, and ignoring the two words she hated. She never looked at the audience, but at the bench, with a quiet, steadfast truthfulness in her clear eyes.

Neil gazed at her in astonishment; he had known intuitively, though she had never spoken to him confidentially on the subject, that her evidence would not go to corroborate Louisa's; but he had never guessed with what real earnestness she would plead for the prisoner, an earnestness more evident in her tone and her face than in the words she uttered.

Marjorie left her place without once venturing to glance at the solitary figure in that railed-off space among the crowd; so she had never seen how his worn face brightened, as he listened hungrily to her rich young voice.

"Lina Chester."

Slowly the girl made her way to the place Marjorie had vacated. In the crush, many moved instinctively to let her pass, pitying the restless pallor on the beautiful face, while others pressed forward to take a full look at it.

"My name is Magdalen Dymocke, and I am sister to the prisoner. You have related the reason of his dropping his real name, and, in doing so, have given it back to him; so I am glad to take mine, too."

Neil, sitting quite still in his place, felt as if the low, shy voice pierced him with pain in every word it uttered.

"We knew Eustace Jelfrey nearly six years ago. He had offered to initiate my brother into the ways of London, as my brother, who was several years younger, had lived through all his youth in a distant part of Cornwall. Into *what* he had power to initiate him, I only knew afterward. What sin he committed, and was clever enough to lay upon my brother, has been spoken of to-day. So skillfully it was done, that the trial resulted in Mr. Jelfrey's escape from suspicion, and in my brother's transportation for eight years. It has been told against him to-day, and again has made him appear guilty. Eustace Jelfrey escaped then. It was easy to him, for he had skill, and craft, and money; my brother had neither, and from that day his life was a ruined and a broken life."

A quick exclamation in the court, and a bottle of smelling-salts passed from hand to hand toward Lina.

"Thank you," she said, turning her eyes gratefully for a moment toward Lady Athelston and Marjorie, "but I am not faint."

Not faint! and the white, nervous fingers holding so tightly for support, and the beautiful, wide eyes so feverish. Neil's heart ached with a heavy pain, his strong, handsome face grew harassed and fretful.

"I am not faint." As she had spoken, her eyes turned again to the prisoner, and then the whole curious crowd saw the look which passed between the brother and sister—a look of deathless love and sympathy and trust—and once more that sound of pity, like a sob, stirred the multitude.

"On the 12th of last November I went to my brother's house in the morning, and arranged to call on him the same day at dusk. Mr. Eustace Jelfrey had had the power placed in his hands, of making known to Lady Athelston (without himself telling her) the secret of our lives, and he had proposed to me certain conditions which, if complied with, should prevent his availing himself of this power. So I went to consult my brother. He was working hard and indefatigably, trying to accumulate the sum for which that forged check had been drawn on Mr. Esdaile, and I was saving to help him. These efforts would be unavailing if we left Highshire, as I knew; and the—and the—those who had been kind and compassionate to us would have cause indeed to despise our memory always. Yet did I not know that now we could not help their despising us, whatever we did? If the truth were told, they would feel what cause they had to scorn us; if we went without its being told, they would know we had deceived them ungratefully."

The high-sheriff, sitting motionless, with folded arms, had his eyes half closed now in their sleepy fashion, so no one saw their dimness.

"When I went in the afternoon to consult my brother, I found that he had gone along the valley to meet the boys on their return from the Low Farm. I followed him, partly because I was really anxious for his answer to be given that evening, and partly because—"

"For what other reason?" The question came promptly from the bench.

"Partly," Lina said, in her truthful, brave simplicity, "because I knew Mr. Jelfrey was going on the same way for the same purpose, and I feared his meeting with my brother. So much of wrong he had done us, and so prosperous was he in his own sins, that I could not help dreading that they should meet at night, in the solitude of the hills, just when this new, craven demand of Mr. Jelfrey's was weighing and pressing on my brother's mind, and he knew that all his hopes of earning work and a home were shattered. I had not quite reached the pool above the valley, when I saw Miss Castillain and the two boys coming on horseback; and we had not quite met when I saw—"

At last the low, anxious voice broke down, while a great silence held the court. But it was only a few moments before she went on, still brave and truthful.

"When I saw my brother and Mr. Jelfrey fighting near the water—close to the water; so near that one of them could hardly help being thrown into the pool, if either were thrown down at all. I remembered, in a sudden terror, that my brother had never heard of the old shaft under the water, and so I hurried on, trying to reach him, and tell him what I knew would stay his hand there on the water's edge."

"Stay. You had good cause, then, to believe that Mr. Jelfrey would be the one to suffer?"

"I did fancy so. I hardly know exactly why," she answered, simply, "but I *did* fancy so. I remembered how many injuries my brother had received, and how the last and greatest had only just before been told him, and must be hurting him keenly then; and I think I fancied that his hand would be the stronger, because the *right* was on his side."

"*Expecting* what the end would be, you tried to reach the two men as they fought?"

"I tried, because I feared what the end might be; because I knew my brother had not heard of the exhausted mine. But I was too late."

"What did you see—exactly?"

"I saw Mr. Jelfrey's hand on my brother's collar, and one moment afterward my brother had thrown him from him, and he had fallen into the water. I can not say what my brother did then, or where Miss Castillain went, for I do not know. I suppose I fainted."

"And when you were conscious again?" The voice of the questioner was a little softened and compassionate.

"When I awoke I found the valley deserted. When it all came back to me, I knew Miss Castillain had gone to tell it, and my first impulse was to fly. I never saw my brother, even for a moment, after that, until I saw him—in jail."

"You have heard the prisoner say that he should think it no sin to kill deceased?"

"Ah! when will these cruel questions cease?" thought Marjorie, her fingers hurt in their tight

clasp, as she gazed at Lina's white and quivering lips.

"Yes; he said it to me. The witness who overheard it will tell of that. Mr. Jelfrey had blighted our lives forever; was it any wonder that my brother should hate him? But this hatred only caused him to avoid Mr. Jelfrey. He has never, to any one but myself, uttered a word to his disparagement. Was he not laboring always to earn what should repay a debt of Eustace Jelfrey's? His nature was, above all things, forbearing. Pre-eminently strong and brave to bear, it always has been; and I have never known him, all his life, willingly hurt even a dog."

Did the prisoner wish to question this witness?

"No, he had no question to ask," the prisoner said, without lifting his eyes.

Only once had he raised them to Lina during her examination. The agony of her face, in which the wonderful dark eyes seemed to burn with love and misery, was more than he dared trust himself to meet again. But while he almost unconsciously watched the effect of her words—almost unconsciously, because his eyes were tired—all feeling, acute and intensified, rushed back to him when he suddenly became aware of how intently Neil Athelston listened—he, the high-sheriff, sitting there in his honor and ease and dignity, watching the misery of the girl who had lived under his roof; and evidently foreseeing the fate of the prisoner, who had no name and no real place in the world, even if he were allowed to be harmless enough to stay in it. A hot light shone in Gerard's eyes at the thought—a passion which literally flamed beneath their heavy, weary lids.

So far there was nothing in the evidence sufficient to cast down Louisa Castillain's spirits; yet the suppressed sigh of pity in the court (suppressed until it was not more than a breath), did give her a creeping, indefinable fear of defeat.

"This slight movement in those people's favor will be of short duration," whispered Lady Helen Burton, encouragingly; "all the evidence goes to prove him guilty. The people now are in just the state to be decided entirely by the last witness; and we need not doubt what the verdict will be when we see who is the last witness. There she is; what a stony-looking creature!"

"Look at Sir Neil; just look how he is watching her. Isn't it absurd?" put in Louisa, sharply.

"Who?" inquired Lady Helen, leveling her lorgnette toward Colonel Stuart's group. "You mean Miss Chester, I suppose—at least Miss Something else, for I am sure I can not find out what her real name is, or if she has one. He must pity the poor little wretch to-day, I should think. It is the last time she will ever find herself under the same roof with Sir Neil Athelston."

"Dorcas Cheere."

The woman, lean and tall and upright, stood there in the witness-box just as she would have stood either in the dock or on the bench; just as she used to stand at her cottage-door, to hurl fierce and wrathful darts from her quick tongue at Fitz. No other attitude came quite naturally to Dorcas yet, and she would adopt no unnatural one for this occasion. Her face was lined and hard, and her lips tight and stern. Even Marjorie, in her keen scrutiny, could detect nothing in her manner beyond its old rigidity. As she took the oath, with cold, scrupulous, and even superstitious correctness, the girl's heart sunk with a sickening despair.

"My name is Dorcas Cheere, and I live in the cottage adjoining that one occupied, through the last summer, by the prisoner at the bar."

Lower and lower sunk Marjorie's heart. Lina's two hands went up to cover her aching eyes. Louisa Castillain leaned a little more forward in her seat, and listened eagerly with parted lips.

"I was very angry when Colonel Stuart obtained for him the cottage next to mine, and I told every one so. I did not know any thing about him, but I knew that I had had no choice in the matter, and I resented it. He had no one living with him but a little boy who called him father. They two muddled on as they could; at least I chose to think their life was a muddle, though I never went to see. I heard them making absurd noises sometimes—singing and laughing and playing, just as if they were two schoolboys out for a holiday—and this naturally aggravated me more. They were very poor, too, and I did not care (as I used to say, whenever I had an opportunity of saying it), for the cottage next mine to be let to a pauper. I knew he worked hard and earned money, yet he had no furniture to speak of, and no comforts in his house, and the mystery of *that* provoked me too. The boy never went to school, nor played with other boys, but was always with his father, as he called him, and he used to read to him for hours and hours at a time. One day Mr. Jelfrey came to my cottage on an excuse of sheltering, though I remember now that he went away in rain as heavy as he came in; and he began to talk of my neighbor, and to say quietly evil things of him; and then he found out from me—though I've been puzzling since to find out how he did it, for I'm no talker and babbler—that the wall in my parlor closet was uncommonly thin, and that I could often hear what the man and boy were saying in the next room. Over and over again he came, after that, pretending he wanted to read a valuable book I had of history—several months at two shillings a month, and unfinished—really, though, to listen to what was going on next door, and to put me up to listening, too. One night he came more quietly than usual, and made more fuss about being polite to me. Miss Chester had gone to the other cottage. I was vicious enough against them, I remember, for I didn't know they were any relation to each other; and he seemed rather to admire me for my anger. I remember he talked a good deal about his life not being safe; in fact, he hinted that no life was safe near Mr. Spendir. I took it all in, and between his speeches we listened to what they might be saying next door. Suddenly he heard what I fancied he must so long have been after. I heard it, too; it was just what I told afterward to Mrs. Esdaile and to the police. One gentleman has repeated the words to-day exact. I recognized their being exact, yet they sounded more revengeful, as he said them, than I thought for.

"That is all, gentlemen, except that I have a bit of a story of my own to tell, if his lordship allows me. I hope he will, for it is as necessary to this trial as repeating those words I overheard. Thank you," she said, as, after a slight discussion, she was told by the clerk to speak up.

"More than thirty years ago"—her voice was slow and calm only by a great effort, while her stern face flushed and paled like a girl's in her excitement—"more than thirty years ago my little girl (my only one) was stolen from me, and I never saw her face again, or heard a word of her welfare or her death. I never knew whether I might watch, as well as wait, for her home-coming, or whether I had any right to dream of a little girl in heaven. For thirty years this suspense made my life cold and hard and solitary, this and my own much-encouraged ill-temper. Now, I know her story, and a little of it I must repeat to-day. When she was grown up (and pretty, as I always knew she would be), this man, whom you call the deceased, saw her, admired her, and persuaded her to marry him. He took her from the good friends who had adopted her and loved her, and he never let them look upon her face again. He gave her a dull, mean home in some out-of-the-way part of London, going to her only occasionally, living a free, gay life himself while she was penned in this comfortless place, alone until after the birth of her son—this boy, gentlemen, who has been called the prisoner's child. At last he left her entirely. She worked for her own livelihood and her baby's, delicate, poor, and friendless. The boy was three or four years old when the prisoner—having heard her story from those friends who had been so good to her—sought her out, and helped and cheered her. He would have sent his sister to her, but that he knew it was no place for her to go alone with her uncommon beauty; so he went on being kind to my little girl, until he was accused of that crime which has been so much talked of to-day—the crime my little girl's cruel husband had committed. I don't know any thing about how it could have happened that he should have been transported for this, but he was, and he went away for eight years. In a little more than four, he came back, because leave had been given him for good conduct. One of his first acts when he reached London was to find out Eustace Jelfrey's neglected wife, to whom he had been good before. He found her in the same comfortless home, poorer, more friendless, more delicate, but not minding so much, because she was fast dying now."

An odd, quick catching of her breath here was all that Dorcas allowed the crowd to hear, or see, of her strongly curbed emotion.

"He—the man you make me call the prisoner—went to her again and again, and when she died, he paid (though Heaven knows he must have been poor enough, and I don't dare to think what hard work he did for that money) for a grave for her, and for careful hands to carry her to it—as people don't carry a pauper. And after that, he took the motherless, homeless, and worse than fatherless boy to a home which he made for him, and to a love and care which never after that failed him. From that day to the night I heard the greater part of this story—after seeing the prisoner taken in handcuffs from his own cottage, with my taunting words ringing in his ears—his home was the boy's home; all he had was shared with the child (shared equally, as two boys might have shared with each other), and in his great love and kindliness he never let the boy know he was not his own son, for fear he should feel the obligation, and fancy that all he did for him was not naturally done.

"Now, gentlemen, you understand that all this while the boy's father was living. Never one penny has he allowed for his son's maintenance; all has been paid out of the hard earnings of the prisoner, who, as we heard to-day, has been saving to pay a debt really owing by this very man. If I could but have that time back again, when I tried to make his life more miserable than it was; when I did all I could to madden him, and *should* have maddened him, only he was always too patient, and too forbearing to be maddened by me—then I should be content. This is what I know of the two men, my lord and gentlemen, and I suppose that when they met they fought. It would have been hard to help it, I should think, remembering all this; and Mr. Jelfrey, after all, is as likely to be alive as dead. It was plain to see he was cunning enough for any thing. But if they *did* fight, and the man who had the best heart and the strongest hand too had punished the coward at last, after years and years of injury, would that act be murder? Even if it would be called manslaughter, the law isn't so honest and just as we're always being told it is."

No voice had silenced, or even interrupted Dorcas. Even the utterly unprofessional part of her evidence fell amidst total silence. The effect of her words was keen and decisive. So earnestly, and with such heart-felt regret had she spoken (losing all thought of what the effect of her words on others was likely to be), that it startled even herself when, out of the silence, there rose the low, sad sound of women's sobs.

In a little haste, the counsel for the prosecution began his cross-examination. When this was over, Dorcas went back to her place beside her little grandson, and the eyes of the prisoner followed her with an untold gladness in them. His boy—his delicate, solitary child—would not be hardly treated now, he knew; would not lay down his head in the darkness, and wish that he might never be called to raise it again. Oh, this was good to know, after those bitter fears for the child, which he had fought with through three long months in prison!

The case was almost closed. The learned doctor, specially retained for the defense, addressed the jury, saying the case he had to submit to them was this:

There really was no evidence to support the charge of manslaughter. The character of the prisoner was unexceptionable, and that of the deceased (if he must call him deceased, when there was no actual proof of his death) very much the reverse. He would leave it with them to decide whether there was a case for a verdict of guilty. Much more than this the doctor said, but in the same strain; and then the judge briefly summed up the evidence, and the jury retired.

One silent, almost breathless, quarter of an hour in court—hope and fear holding their sway in hundreds of hearts, and hanging their ensigns on hundreds of faces—and then the door was opened, and the jurymen returned, one standing forward and looking at the judge. An utter silence, for the hearing of the verdict, in every corner of the court.

"Not guilty."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DISPERSED.

To a ringing cheer which throbbed to the roof of the crowded building, this much-talked-of trial ended, and Gerard Dymocke came out into the open air before the twilight of the March evening-had gathered. It was months since he had breathed the wide, pure breath of heaven, unfettered and unconfined, and the sensation made him totter for a moment. Then he drew his hand hastily across his forehead, partly in weariness and bewilderment, partly in his great relief.

Colonel Stuart had given him the address of an inn where he was to join him, and Gerard knew that it would be near, and that it was chosen that he might avoid the crowd.

Would Magdalen come back to him now? Would she be well enough and strong enough now to go with him—traveling as poor people travel?

"The hotel is quite full this evening; there really is no private room vacant."

Gerard handed to the landlord the card which the colonel had given him. Then came the words,

"Oh yes. The gentleman meant the room reserved by Colonel Stuart. It was all right. It had been kept all day for him."

He would stay there a few minutes for Colonel Stuart, Gerard said, tiredly, as he went in. No thought but the thought that Lina might come could have induced him to wait at all.

The carriages were rolling as rapidly now from the front of the Assize Court as they had rolled thither in the excitement of the morning. But the feelings of most of the occupants were strangely changed.

"Louie, dear," said Lady Helen Burton, noticing the anger and disappointment which flushed Miss Castillain's cheeks, "you must come home with Reggie and me, and stay at Burton for a few days. We will take no refusal, will we, Reggie?"

Reginald, Viscount Lythwood, managed to assert, with his favorite smile and lisp, that it was impossible for *him* to take a refusal from Miss Castillain.

So Louisa, comforted a little, allowed him to hand her to a seat in the handsome coroneted carriage; after which he made himself as comfortable as he could, preparatory to making himself agreeable also.

Viscount Lythwood was languidly aware of the truth of the fact his father perpetually urged upon him, that it would be greatly to his advantage to marry one of the heiresses of old Castillain of Hawkedale. He knew as well as his father knew how seldom he would be likely to meet with a girl who possessed so strongly the three recommendations which were pointed out to him in the elder of these heiresses (the younger had been engaged when Lord Lythwood returned from making the grand tour)—great wealth (that was, of course, the first and weightiest charm), personal beauty, and (not the least weighty) a readiness to be won. All these charms had been pointed out to him, and he was sufficiently wise in his generation to feel the full value of them, and languidly to accept the good the gods provided.

The slight form of the little viscount leaned affectedly toward Louisa, and his lisping, slow words soon brought the smile back to her face, though they were by no means remarkable for genial or pointed wit.

So the earl's carriage rolled away, while the high-sheriff's splendid horses impatiently pawed the ground before the chief entrance to the court.

Marjorie, on her way through the vestibule with Lady Athelston, stopped a moment beside Colonel Stuart's party; a soft bright pink in her cheeks, and a happy light in her eyes, as she watched Neil's mother take the hand of her old companion, and ask where she was going.

"Home with me," said Mrs. Esdaile, trying to speak genially into the trumpet, though it was a great effort to her. "I can not spare her yet, nor can Jack. When she is a little stronger, I suppose we must let her brother take her from us again."

"Oh, Lina," whispered Marjorie, in her earnest, glad voice, "I'm so happy, and so grateful! If we were not in a crowd, I should kiss you while I say it. Are you going to him now?"

"Colonel Stuart thinks," said Lina, a great glad light shining in her beautiful eyes, "that he can bring him to The Anchorage, and he is going to try. He is going to him now; he thinks Gerard is more likely to come if I do not go yet—that he will come to fetch me."

"Only," smiled Marjorie, "they will not let you go, of course, while you are so weak."

"Oh, I am strong now," the girl answered, with quick pleasure. "This has made me strong all at once."

"You think so now, dear."

"No, I shall not let her go out of my care, even into her brother's quite yet," put in Mrs. Esdaile, kindly. "But, all the same, we want to see him at The Anchorage; and as Alick thinks he is more likely to come with him alone, we are going to the hotel to await them."

"If Colonel Stuart thinks that is wisest, it is sure to be so," said Marjorie, gently. "Lina, I shall come to see you and Adelaide to-morrow, and I fancy Lady Athelston will insist on coming too. Now I must snatch a minute to speak to Dorcas; I must, even if Lady Athelston sends all the javelin-men to stop me. Mrs. Cheere has decided to take a fly all the way home, and Colonel Stuart has taken Jet, and gone to order it. Just as if it were to be a peculiar vehicle which only he and Jet could choose."

"I think I know why he has taken Jet to that hotel," said Lina, with a slow, glad smile of comprehension.

Then, after Marjorie's assenting nod, she followed Mrs. Esdaile through the portico, little Jack keeping beside her protectingly. Out upon the steps to them came Neil, his bright head bare, his long blue eyes sparkling with something deeper than excitement.

"Miss Chester, tell me how glad you are; tell me that the first trial of my high-shrievalty has been a happy one for you."

"Happy!" echoed Lina, the old shadow falling over her face.

"Has *ended* happily, at any rate," he corrected, with an anxious gaze.

"It has ended as I never dared to hope that it would end," she answered. "Thank you for being glad for us, Sir Neil."

He felt then just a shade discomfited; it was

not for "us" he had been glad. He had only rejoiced exceedingly to see Lina's face without that look of misery which it had worn all day. He lingered beside Mrs. Esdaile's carriage, longing to say more, yet entirely at a loss what to say, as he had rarely been in his life before.

"Here I am, Neil," put in Marjorie, to the rescue. "Now, put me into the brougham to your mother. I know she's tired of waiting; and the peculiarity of women is, that they require to be put by gentlemen into carriages, as if they were rugs. Neil, I'm helpless, almost, in my great surprise," she added, turning with him, after her bright little nod into Mrs. Esdaile's carriage, "at the rapid growth of the twin canaries' calves. Why, they must have been in a hot-bed since I saw them last, when they were of quite ordinary dimensions."

"I should not like to see them pricked," laughed Neil.

"I should; it would be such a pleasant reminder of my doll days. I've been as weak as usual, Neil; I've promised to go home with your mother for to-night."

"That's kind, dear," he answered, folding a shawl about his mother, and receiving placidly the proud, pleased smile with which she rewarded him.

And so, one after another, the carriages drove away, and the crowd dissolved in a manner usual with crowds, and as inexplicable as the great problem which has to do with the disappearance of pins.

There was hardly a sound of the day's excitement heard in the room where Gerard waited; for the tan upon the street deadened all sound of passing wheels, and the bustling, hungry demands had hardly yet begun to disturb the quiet of the hotel.

The twilight of the March evening was creeping slowly down upon the busy town, when the handle of the door was turned with an unsteady awkwardness, and Gerard, watching and waiting, saw the door open to admit Jet's small figure, and pale, eager face.

"Dad! oh, dad!"

Such a cry it was! so full of love, and longing, and overwrought excitement; yet subdued, as were all the child's words and actions now. There was an utter silence in the room. The boy's care-worn, anxious little face was hidden on the man's broad breast, and the strong arms, freed at last, were tight and close about him.

"Dad"—the young voice was the first to break the silence—"will you come with grandmother and me?"

"Not to-night, laddie." Ah! what joy it was to the shy, tender-hearted child to hear the old pet name once more! "But I will come back to you."

"When, father?"

"Not *father*, dear," the young man said. "Don't you remember that story which we learned off by heart one night?"

"I *must* say 'father,'" whispered the boy, wistfully; "Mrs.—I mean granny, says I may. Father, she's so good to me!"

"I know it, laddie; I saw it to-day." And Gerard's beautiful, warm eyes were looking straight into the child's, with a laughing light in their depths, just as they used to look so often in the old busy, happy, struggling times. "And doesn't it make you proud to have an English history to read at last? But, listen—you mustn't be deluded enough to fancy that you will find the stories there exactly as I used to tell them. Real historians are apt to forget the parts I used to remember."

Jet's soft, long-forgotten laugh was good to hear.

"You made lots of them up, dad, I can guess now, by your eyes; but—but I can never read the big history that—that—Mr. Jelfrey used to read, because—because that very first night, dad, when I was sitting so miserable by the fire, she—granny, I mean—burned it; burned it all, every number, one after another. I know why now; but I was frightened then."

"Now, go, dear lad, to granny."

The young man's voice was gentle with an untold gentleness, and the child's face—so wistful and sorrowful now that that night had been recalled—was pressed once more in silence to his own.

A few minutes after that, Jet was driving along the dusky highway to Churchill, his tired head at rest upon his grandmother's arm, as she sat upright in her corner of the fly, unbent and seemingly unbendable, but with a strange new weakness glittering in her eyes.

And the colonel and Gerard sat together in the inn.

"Think better of this decision, Spendir (the old name slips out, you see); come with us to-night, and we will let you leave again whenever you choose, even to-morrow, if you wish it. Come and spend this evening with your sister."

"I can not," the young man answered, with grave decision. "The wish is kind, as all your wishes are, Colonel Stuart; but I can not—nor can I even explain why."

"Never mind that," put in the colonel; "I understand without explanation. But I trust you will reconsider your decision; we shall all be so glad to take you home with us."

"Not yet," said Gerard, with a sadness which he strongly fought against. "I have a stain upon my name, and—and the burden is one I can only bear alone. A stain upon my name, I said! What name have I? Who can imagine, after that scene in court to-day, that I have any name to call my own—or my sister's? Colonel Stuart, can I use my freedom until I have won us the name we inherit? That is my first work."

"But this is absurd, Spendir," exclaimed the colonel, somewhat hotly. "You are fit now only to rest and sleep; and— Have you eaten any thing to-day?"

"I forget," Gerard answered, absently; "I am not hungry, so I suppose I have."

A hurt and rather puzzled look was on the officer's face as he rang, and ordered dinner.

"Spendir," he said then, laying his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder, "promise to take your dinner heartily as a man should after a long day's fast. If you will not come with me, I will bring your sister to say good-bye; but I will not go until you give me this promise. You will make her most unhappy, too, if you refuse me in this."

"I will try, indeed. Colonel Stuart," he added, with a sudden brightness in his tired eyes, "is Lina really going with you—really going back with Mrs. Esdaile—to your happy, easeful home?"

"She is really coming with us, I am very glad to say," returned the colonel, his face saddening pitifully. "She is not well enough yet for any thing but to rest and recruit. The question now is whether she will not feel all the pleasure taken away from her by your refusal to come too. Have you thought of this?"

"Colonel Stuart," the young man said, "I can not think how I can ask more from you when you do so much; but will you really bring her here before I go, just for five minutes—only five minutes?"

This quiet, sad request was just what the colonel knew would be the indisputable sign that his own proposal was unavailing.

"If you refuse really to join her," he said, "she will, I know, want to accompany you at once. Of course, you will not allow that. It would be ruin to her health to travel now."

"To travel as she must travel with me? Yes, it would be bad for her," the artist said. "I am only too grateful, Colonel Stuart, to leave her in the home you offer her until she is better. I could not take her; but it will be easier to begin my travels and work, if I hear her say good-bye, and pray God speed me."

"Spendir," put in the officer, with sudden earnestness, "let this uncertain search go by. You will wear blamelessly any name you choose. Why search for one which—"

"But the name I seek," Gerard interrupted, with the old dauntless spirit in his dark, worn face, "is my mother's, and I seek it for her. If I can put it on her nameless grave, and see Lina bear it proudly and purely—as she would bear any name—I think I shall have no wish beyond."

"You will have many wishes beyond," laughed Colonel Stuart, hurriedly. "Wishes are natural and healthy for a brave fellow like yourself."

"Perhaps so," was the answer. "Isn't it Claudio who says that the only medicine the miserable have is hope? It must be true. I am miserable enough, yet I have hope. I can not say for what, or where I found it; but it is certainly here—even yet."

"Of course," the colonel answered, pleasantly. "It will always keep you company, go where you will."

"Even with a brand upon me—a nameless convict," added Gerard, with a smile. "Will you tell the master of High Athelston what I am going to do, Colonel Stuart, and that I shall come back when I have found what I seek—not before?"

"I do not trust to that; you are too sensible to stick to that determination, Spendir. Take the journey, but let us see you again soon. In the hall below you will find your portmanteau packed. I did it myself; no one else has been to the cottage. I packed it with every thing I thought you would need, and that had not been sent you before; and in it is your money, and the key of the cottage. No one is to enter it until you yourself return there. You will be sure of that, because you have the key with you. No one ever *has* entered it yet, except myself that once. There it is as you left it; and so it will be, until you yourself unlock the door. Spendir, you will come back, if only to see your boy again? And we shall take great care of your sister, all of us. You may judge what care Miss Marjorie Castillain will take of her after those messages of hers to you; and you know by this time whether my sister and I will not do so."

But Gerard had covered his face now, and hidden it.

"I will fetch her," concluded the colonel, his voice a little broken as he moved away. "Remember you have promised to dine—and I never knew you break your word."

One short half-hour, sad and yet happy too, the brother and sister spent together in that quiet room; no one breaking in upon their farewell, no one witnessing their brave, hopeful sympathy. Then Lina joined Mrs. Esdaile and Colonel Stuart again, and drove away with them to the pleasant home which had been opened so kindly to her when she had no home in the world to call her own.

And in the silent room she had left, Gerard bravely tried to keep his promise to his one kind friend, but failed sorely. The dinner—not quite untasted—was taken down presently, to his great relief; and then he sat beside the window and rested in the dark. A poor, unhelpful rest it was for the man whose brain and heart were burning.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

NIGHT-FALL AMONG THE GRAVES.

A BEAUTIFUL May morning; its sunshine falling full upon two travelers who lounged against the gate of a roadside station in the South of Devonshire. As they waited for their train, they fell into conversation, chattering of where they had been, and whither they were going, as travelers naturally do, even if their acquaintanceship be only a few minutes old, as was the acquaintanceship of these two.

One was very young in appearance, scarcely more than a boy, and carried a fishing-basket slung across his shoulder. The other was a young man, too, wanting two years yet of thirty; but he had the look upon his face of one who had lived through the cares and disappointments of a life. Such a handsome face it was, though; bearded and sunburned, with strength in every feature, yet with the gentleness and refinement which, added to strength, form the most essential manliness; with brave, fearless eyes, in which there lay always, deep down, a steadfast quietude, which seemed to set this man apart from others of his age.

Gerard—for it was he—was listening while his companion idly told of a village which he had gone out of his way to visit, and the young fisherman graciously accepted the eager attention, as a tribute to his powers of description. Naturally; for how could he know that this apparently well-seasoned traveler gave always the same rapt attention to any one who would tell him of a village which he had not yet visited?

"If you had not been coming on to Penzance," the young tourist said, glancing with unconscious admiration into the listening face above him, "I believe you would really have been tempted to find out this dull and samey little place, which I should never have gone near, but for knowing that the rector (having been my tutor once) would never forgive me if I passed within access of his place, and did not turn aside to see him.

But if you *do* find the temptation irresistible, I will direct you across the country."

This was said in laughing irony, and the speaker opened his eyes wide indeed when Gerard gravely accepted the offer, and turned to leave the station, simply waiting for the proffered directions. They were given in much amusement and surprise; and when Gerard had shown that he understood them, the travelers parted with a jest.

"Good-morning. If you mean to go out of your way to visit on foot every village and hamlet that you hear of, winter will comfortably have set in before you see St. Michael's Mount."

"No matter," answered Gerard, pleasantly. "I would rather visit a village I've never seen before than St. Michael's Mount, which I've seen a hundred times; and I'm strong enough to walk any distance. Good-morning, and thank you."

And so, half laughing, he started on his way; the old hope, which had lived through the sad experience of many years, making his step light, though day after day he had been wearying himself to meet only defeat and disappointment.

The sun was pouring its hot beams upon the white highway, when at last the gray tower of a village church shone out among the trees, silvery in the sunshine. Gerard's heart throbbed as he neared it; but, then, so many times before had his heart throbbed with hope, when he felt that there was just the possibility of his engrossing, long-nursed wish meeting its fulfillment!

On the outskirts of the village, he passed a handsome red house in a lawn. That was the rectory, of course. Then came the cottages, scattered here and there on the roadside; then a high square house, with pillars at the door, and a brilliant sign-board above.

Pleasantly returning the salutation of the comely landlord of this comely village inn, Gerard walked on toward the church. It lay a hundred yards farther on, separated from the road by a high railing, the gate in which stood now wide open. Gerard, with his foot upon the step, and his hand upon the gate, stood a moment, breathing quickly. Before him was an old wooden porch, with a leaning cross upon it; below that, a solitary gravestone lay in the footway; and these things—so strange to him, yet so familiar—made his pulses throb, and dimmed his eyes, as no tears could dim them.

An old man, working in the church-yard, saw him stand so for long minutes, and waited curiously for an opportunity to open a conversation, as old sextons have delighted in doing, ever since (if not before) the days of Hamlet.

"A fine old church, sir. Do'ee wish to see it?"

He had taken heart of grace, and approached Gerard, rather taken aback, though, by the bewildered gaze which met his.

Gerard shook his head, passing on toward the grave outside the porch, and bending to read the words upon it:

"MAGDALEN.

"This simple stone shall bear a simple line:
Here lies a sinner saved by grace Divine."

Not a word did Gerard utter, even in a whisper to himself; no thought even shaped itself to him; but he knew that a great and overpowering gratitude filled his heart to overflowing.

He leaned against the church-porch, weak and trembling. It was not because the old man's eyes were upon him that he did not hide his face there, sobbing like a child. It was only that the truth had not yet entered his heart, was only surging wildly in his pulses, giving him a joy and hope that were confused like madness.

"Would 'ee like the key of the church, sir?"

Slowly the words made themselves clear to Gerard.

"Yes," he answered, unsteadily. "Will you go and—"

But here his voice faltered again, for as he looked up he caught sight of the old sun-dial with its moss-grown pedestal.

"I'll fetch 'ee the key, sir."

"But," said Gerard, looking into the old man's inquisitive face, while his eyes for the first time lost their far-away engrossed expression; "but I want more than that. I want to see the register. Can I?"

"Why not, sir? Parson 'll have to come himself, that's all. I'll go and fetch un."

So he went, while Gerard sat in the porch alone, trying to make the wonderful familiarity of this place distinct to his bewildered, grateful thoughts, and trying, too—poor Gerard!—to prepare himself for another disappointment, perhaps to be the last, as it would be the greatest, of all.

More than an hour had passed for him so, when the old man returned with the clergyman of the village. Before he and Gerard had reached the vestry together—after talking a few minutes in the porch—the clergyman had, as he fancied, read a whole story in the young man's dark, thoughtful face, and handsome, shabbily attired figure; and he not only acknowledged him a gentleman, but even one whose knowledge had, by some means, sounded unusual depths.

"The marriage register of twenty-nine years ago," he repeated, taking the musty old books from a safe which he had unlocked. "That would be the year— Ah! here it is! Before my time, a good bit. What is it, Dare? I will come out into the aisle to you. Will you excuse me?" he added, turning to Gerard, who tried to smile his thanks for the thoughtful act.

May—June—July. Yes, that was the month his mother left the old farm near the coast. There was only one marriage registered through the whole month. Ah!

Down upon him, as he sat alone in the dusty vestry, had come a flood of radiant, dazzling light. Ah! what a pitiful heaven had sent it round him in his doubt and fear and shame! Here was the marriage register of Sir Gerard Athelston, Baronet, of High Athelston, in the County of Highshire, with Magdalen, only daughter of Hiram Dymocke, of Tresean Farm, in the County of Cornwall; and the signatures were there, and the date, and—and— Down on his knees upon the stones, fell Gerard; his head bowed upon the paper, and all his heart poured out in gratitude to his God for this.

"I am very glad to have been of service to you," said the rector, when Gerard and he stood in the church-porch together again; "and I shall recollect exactly what it is, when I am called upon to show the register to others."

Gerard thanked him with a clasp of the hand which was strong and firm and gentle, like him-

self; and the old sexton, too, had his hand-shake before the crown was slipped into his palm; then both the clergyman and grave-digger stood watching the young man, with rather a novel kind of interest.

From the gate, Gerard gave another glance (such a lingering one!) back at the church-porch and the low grave; then he walked away rapidly toward the station, his eyes dim with gladness, his lips whispering again and again his mother's name, and Lina's, and his own, which had been his father's.

"Magdalen Athelston—Magdalen, Lady Athelston; Gerard Athelston — Sir Gerard Athelston."

Gerard never entertained the possibility of there being no other train which would take him to Penzance that day; he only felt now that he must hasten on to Tresean, and tell his grandfather the good, happy news—how he had found at last what he had sought so long. He had no thought to-day to give to the injustice which had caused the old home to be closed against him and Lina, as it had years before been closed against their mother. He had no thought to give to his grandfather's hardness and cruelty; he only felt that, first of all, he must go and gladden him by telling him how true were his daughter's dying words. He must make bright again every remembrance of her. He must bring back to the old man's heart the love that had once been so tender. How happy it would make him!

There *was* another train for Penzance that evening, and Gerard took his seat in it, his heart still beating quickly in his great excitement. Tresean lay eight or nine miles from Penzance, and there was no regular conveyance going at that hour; but nothing could delay or discourage Gerard now. He set out to walk along the coast, every step of which was familiar to him, as quickly as if most of the previous hours of that day had been spent in resting instead of walking; and hardly had his step once slackened, when the old farm itself, the chill, unloving home of his youth and boyhood, came in sight.

Quickly and more quickly his pulses beat. The weariness (though it might cruelly tell upon him by-and-by) was not even thought of now. But there was one spot he must see before he went back to his mother's early home—her nameless and unhonored grave.

Leaving the farm upon his left, he turned up a stony little lane, from which he could see, far beyond him, the church tower, rising dim and solitary against the dusk of the evening sky. Down below him, in the little wood he skirted, the smoke curled up from a solitary cottage.

That was the keeper's cottage where his mother died. He should like to go there—he *must* go there—before he left Cornwall again; to claim his name and his inheritance; after he had seen his grandfather and made him happy. What would he say? What would the old man think? Would he show his happiness? Would it overpower him? Sudden joy was as hard to bear as—harder than any thing, Gerard thought to-night.

How well Gerard remembered the narrow, steep road! How many, and many, and many a time he and Lina had walked this way to church, and thought it so long! Two miles, it was considered. Why, it did not seem a mile to-night; for was not there the church just before him now?

Gerard knew where to find the curious old Cornish stile into the church-yard, though the gate might be locked; but should he be able, before the deepening twilight grew and gathered into night, to find that grave on which there had never been a stone? He had only seen it once. It was not until the night before he left Cornwall with Lina, that his grandfather's sister had told him his mother's story; and only in the morning before they started had he been shown the grave which was his mother's, lying under the rough stone wall which bounded the church-yard. But if the light would only last long enough, he had no fear of not recognizing it.

Slowly Gerard went up the narrow, stony path toward where he knew it lay, his head bent in the softened, dying light. There were no heavy trees to intersect the sky; the letters on most of the stones could still be read without trouble. How familiar it all seemed to him! Here was the great square stone, the words on which he and Lina, as little children, had so often puzzled over in vain:

"Sacred to the Memory of Christian Polivy, and his wife Grace. The former substituted a temporal for an eternal existence on the fiftieth anniversary of his birth; the latter relinquished this transitory state, in the agreeable prospect of a superior one, on the identical day in the succeeding year."

Gerard moved on, musing why such words should be chosen just to mark the simple passage of death.

"The simple passage of death."

He repeated the words, wondering why they had risen so readily to his lips.

Here was another well-remembered head-stone, which Lina and he used to notice and wonder over:

"Husband, farewell!—my life is past!
I loved you well while life did last.
Lord grant you joy where'er you are:
Yourself prepare to follow me."

Why had the words been left, when the poor husband to whom the farewell (and the warning) had been addressed had himself been laid there only five days afterward, as the words below proved? And why, mused Gerard, absently, did the stone-mason sacrifice the old lady's rhyme to his own peculiar notions of grammar?

Ah! that was a new stone! Its whiteness made the large black letters stand out clear and striking. Gerard's eyes (searching earnestly and untiringly) fell upon them, and rested there:

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death."

Over and over again the words seemed to come before him, even after he had passed the new, white head-stone.

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death."

A little farther on lay the grave he sought, just under the wall there — only a few steps farther on. Was that it? Slowly Gerard approached and bent above it. Yes, this was it — this narrow, grass-covered hillock under the wall. Gently, as if the stillness of the time and place had wrapped themselves about him, he knelt, and laid his two hands softly on the grave.

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death."

Not written there, these words—only uttered. He had found it at last; this grave with no name upon it, this grave which had lain unnoticed here for nearly thirty years; and *he* had the right to bring the sunshine full upon it, and make his mother's name an honored one.

Was it the great mental excitement, or the bodily fatigue, which was telling upon him now? Making no effort against this new weariness, he lay down upon the ground, and laid his face upon the turf, whispering one word as he had never whispered it in all his life before,

"Mother!"

Lying in the stillness there, Gerard felt a strange, new happiness creep into his heart; a happiness such as he had never even dreamed of; though, in all his suffering and degradation, he *had* dreamed of happiness—poor Gerard!

The darkness of the spring night came softly down upon the hallowed ground, and still Gerard Athelston lay there with his face upon his mother's grave, dimly conscious that a great blessing had been given both to him and to those he loved, but no longer quite conscious what that blessing was. All the passion which had troubled his restless heart for years was quieted now. All the scorn and rebellion which had ever risen to his lips were softened now. His eyes, so calm and trustful, and so full of rest and quietness, could never darken again to anger or contempt.

The stars came peeping, one by one, from the far-off heaven; and shone, calm and tender, down upon the quiet dead. One fell, swift and bright, across the wide, dim gray; and Gerard watched it dreamily, wondering if it could be that angels fell from heaven now, as they had fallen long ago. And the darkness deepened, and the night came down upon the silence—softly and tenderly, however treacherously, there among the homes of the dead.

CHAPTER XL.

AT HOME AGAIN.

In the May sunshine, pouring warmly through the large bow-window of the library at The Anchorage, Lina Chester sat, with her eyes fixed upon the winding drive which led from the lawn gate to the front entrance of the house. Opposite to her, Marjorie Castillain knelt on the soft white mat, and, leaning from the open window, played with the dainty roses which looked so brightly up to greet the sun-rays.

All through the spring months, a certain quietness, new to Marjorie, had gradually grown to belong to her, and even those who knew her best, and loved her best, could scarcely comprehend it. Could it be, they said, because the friend whom she had taken to her heart seemed drooping as the summer came? Or could it be because the time was near now for her marriage with Sir Neil Athelston, according to the old agreement? Or could it be because her sister was even colder and more harsh to her now than she had ever been before?

What could it be? Often and often Lina wondered, as she was wondering now, sitting and watching Marjorie in the sunshine. Often and often Neil wondered, recalling the bright laughter and heedless raillery which for all her life had belonged to her. Often and often Mrs. Esdaile wondered, looking in vain for an answer either from Neil or from Marjorie herself. Often and often Colonel Stuart wondered, loitering alone about his pleasant garden, in the dusk of these calm spring evenings, and letting the thoughts crowd thick and fast upon him then, which he had put aside all day, and which (unshared) must slowly do their part in making the grave and thoughtful soldier older than his years.

But the question was answered to none. Did even Marjorie herself know exactly what it was which made her step slow, and her eyes so often far away and sad—the radiant, laughing eyes? Sometimes, watching anxiously and vainly for the return of strength in Lina's frail form, she fancied that she understood it. Sometimes, watching Neil hurrying up that sunny gravel path, she fancied again that she understood it. But never, except when she was quite alone, and recalling grave, kind, helpful words which she always seemed to disregard, did she approach the truth.

"Lina, do you notice how naturally it comes to one to watch the entrance gate from this open window?" said Marjorie, turning to look into her companion's face, with a startled look, as if conscious of having been watching for rather a noticeably long time.

"It comes sadly natural to me now," said Lina, her own eyes coming slowly home from their distant gaze. "Are you very tired of seeing me do it, Miss Marjorie?"

"I spoke because I fancied you would notice *me*," answered Marjorie, leaning her head against the window and looking at Lina with a smile. "I can not think why I do it either, for Neil's receding figure has been invisible for half an hour at least. Don't you think Neil looked dreadfully harassed to-day, Lina?"

"I hardly saw him for one minute," replied Lina, with a sudden weariness in her tone.

"No; and that proves for Neil that there is one thing he tries to do which is not for his own pleasure. He will not force his presence where he knows it is not welcomed. In that he is strangely altered. In one or two other respects he is altered, too," added Marjorie, her eyes filled with bright tenderness as they met Lina's. "You would hardly notice the change, dear, as I should—I who have known him so long—but one year has changed him more than could ten such years as those he spent before last spring; and the change is plainly written in his face. He looks ten years older than he looked that day, among the fallen leaves, when he asked me so complacently to be his wife. He looks a man of six-and-thirty now, yet he is only six-and-twenty."

"No; only six-and-twenty—just six-and-twenty," said Lina, absently, thinking of her own age and Gerard's, and of how soon after her father's death his widow had married Neil's father.

"One thing that tells upon him is the constant worrying of his mother," resumed Marjorie, curiously watching Lina's face. "Continual dropping will wear away a stone, they tell us; and the continual dropping of Lady Athelston's fretfulness will, of course, wear away Neil's comfort and good looks. Nothing pleases her now; nothing seems to her fancy to go rightly at

High Athelston; nothing will please her again until *you* go back to her. I never saw a rudderless vessel," concluded Marjorie, with the old, swift brightness of laughter in her eyes, "but I should fancy Lady Athelston looks as like one as —as she feels."

"But is not Sir Neil her rudder now, as he has always been?" inquired Lina, seeing that Miss Castillain waited for her reply.

"No, she feels that he has failed her. She began to think it when he took upon himself to make her dismiss Fletcher, for the tales she had been in the habit of composing about you. She went on thinking it when he got this new sort of quiet, determined way about him; and she finished thinking it when she found he had some purpose of his own, and kept to it. One thing upholds her, though; that is, the cessation of hostilities between Neil and myself. 'Marjorie, my dear,' she says to me, plaintively, 'you have learned at last, as I always prognosticated you would, how much more indulgent Neil is when you let him have entirely his own way. I knew you would learn this before your marriage; and now I feel sure you will be the happiest wife in Highshire!' Poor old lady! I could heartily laugh, if it were not that she is as much in earnest over this idea as she can be over any thing. Her management of her only son has not been all-successful, has it? Poor Neil! poor Neil!"

Again Marjorie's eyes turned to the scene beyond the open window, and lingered far off again, with that gentleness which was utterly sad in the girl whose every glance had used to be armed with fun and raillery.

"Ah, Lina, look! There is a curious sight. Mrs. Cheere coming through the gate; coming up to the house, I declare. I should like to run and meet her; I should if—this were my own house."

A sudden movement Marjorie made. Clasping one of the rose-sprays in her two hands, she bent her face within them, too, inhaling the scent thirstily; but Lina saw the soft tint of the rose itself mount rapidly from cheek to brow. Unconsciously, in her thoughts, Lina repeated those last few words, seeking a cause for this; but before she was aware of their meaning, she, too, had caught sight of Dorcas walking rather hastily up the lawn. Then, with a sudden flash of hope, which was literally akin to pain, she half rose in her seat.

"Oh! do you think," she faltered, "Miss Marjorie, is it possible she has news for *me?*"

"My dear," said Marjorie, forgetting every other thought in her sympathy for the girl who had waited so patiently through these spring months for her brother's return, "she would hardly be the one to meet the news before ourselves; she is always welcome here, so it is no wonder that she comes. But we shall soon hear."

Then Marjorie, rising from the floor, took up her work, and, as she sewed, she chatted pleasantly to draw Lina's thoughts from those possible —only just possible—tidings of Mrs. Cheere's.

Hardly ten minutes had been spent so, when Marjorie caught sight of Dorcas walking back again toward the gate, with Colonel Stuart at her side. She made no allusion to this, but on his return he came straight into the room to the girls. Searchingly Marjorie's eyes met him as he entered, and the question that they asked so mutely, he *answered with a quiet smile.*

"Miss Chester," he said, gently, as he stood beside her, "I have ordered the pony to be harnessed in Adelaide's little carriage; for I want you to have a drive. Such a day as this should not be wasted indoors. Miss Marjorie, you walked from Hawkedale, so I want you to have the drive too. If I say so, shall you immediately refuse, *because* I say so?"

"May I drive, Lina?" she asked, her eyes gentle and wistful as she read his gaze, and the cool contradiction far enough from her lips now.

"Thank you, Colonel Stuart," said Lina, her weak hands locked before her as she rose. "Has Gerard come?"

"Yes, he has come," the officer answered, hardly wondering at the question, because he knew how ever-present with her was the hope of Gerard's return, "and he is at the old home. He went straight to the cottage in Nether Lane, as I fancied he would, and Mrs. Cheere has just been to tell us."

"He—he did not come himself?" faltered Lina.

"He would be tired, and hardly care to have the trouble of greeting us all yet, however anxious we might be to see him. Besides, he would naturally wish to meet you first alone."

"Thank you; then—may I go?"

Colonel Stuart opened the door without answering. Something, either in the news he had just heard, or in the girl's face, made him fear his own voice.

"Miss Marjorie," he said, when Lina had passed out of hearing, "you are her best companion now. She will not care for me to take her. Will you? I will tell Adelaide as soon as she returns."

"I will drive her to the cottage," Marjorie answered, softly, "and then come back. If you and Adelaide let me, I can fetch her again later on. Colonel Stuart, I am afraid he is ill."

"I am afraid so, too," he answered. "He looks so, Dorcas says; but he is travel-tired, I dare say. When his sister has been with him, I may go."

Very silently the two girls drove through the town, and then along the lane to the two white cottages. Once they spoke of the primroses on the hedge-bank; once of the bells, which were ringing merrily as they passed through the town; and once or twice of the pony, who capered briskly along the sunny lane; but never once of the thoughts nearest their hearts; and each time quietly, as if in the hush of a shadow they could not even understand.

"Good-bye, Lina dear," said Marjorie, softly, as the pony stood before the wicket gate, which Mrs. Esdaile's trim little groom held open; "I will come back for you in two or three hours' time."

Then she turned and drove away, without waiting for any reply; and Lina hastened up the garden-path, trembling unaccountably as she neared the cottage. Bright and warm as the sun shone without, there was a fire burning in the grate, which had been brushed and polished by hands that had more experience than those which used to try to keep it bright in the old time. Drawn close beside it, was a stiff little horse-hair couch, which Marjorie would have recognized as Mrs. Cheere's, but which Lina had never seen before.

Gerard was not lying on it now. At the sound of her step he had risen with a strength of ex-

citement, which, for the moment that it lasted, was like the strength of old times—just for the moment that it lasted. And while he held her in his close and tender clasp, he whispered that he had found what he sought; found it all just as their mother remembered.

"Each day, each hour of all those two months," he said, "I felt that I might find it, and knew that when I did I should come home to tell you. How could I write to tell you, dear? And could I write to say I had *not* found it, when, before the letter reached you, I might have done so? You see now, Lina, why you have waited. Dear, was not hope with you all the time, as it was with me?"

Lina, her eyes wide and bright, and her breath coming quickly, stood to listen to his words, both her hands held fast in his.

"Gerard," she faltered, trembling feebly in her untold joy, "it is worth waiting for. Our own mother's name can live pure and bright in our own hearts forever; but—but you are tired and ill."

"A little, dear," he answered, gently; "but I have not told you half I have to tell. Lina, oh, Lina, you should have seen the old man's joy when I told him of our mother's marriage; his joy, and his remorse, and his regret, and something else—something like *love*, even for you and me. He would never have consented to my leaving him again yet, but that I have come to fetch you; and to let that selfish interloper know that what I told him I was going to find I have found; and to—"

"To see the old place again, Gerard," she put in, her quiet voice soothing and calming the excitability which she knew must hurt him, while he looked so weak and ill; the excitability which had always belonged to his nature, in spite of all its patient, brave forbearance.

She laid his head back upon the cushion of the hard little couch, and kissed his feverish lips again and again; starting a few minutes afterward to note how strangely, suddenly chill they had grown.

"The room seems colder than it used to be," he said, his lips quivering on his teeth as he looked round. "Is it because it has been so long uninhabited?"

"I will soon have the cottage warm and bright and sunny, Gerard, dear," said his sister, her voice a little broken as she noticed how richly the May sunshine shone into the room. "For us two, living together again as we have lived so long, this will be quite a pleasant home, until we are both strong enough to travel."

"Let me look at you, my dear. Have the worry and the trouble I have caused you left their marks upon you still?"

"I never had fatigue or anxiety to bear without stupidly showing how weakly I bore it—had I, Gerard?" she asked, only anxious now that he should feel a dread of *her* traveling, because she dreaded it so much for him.

And while she softly moved about the room, giving it, with the sweetness and brightness of her presence, a look of home which it had never had before, he followed every movement with a deep sadness in his beautiful eyes, wondering if the worries and the troubles he had meant (of which she had so large a share, and which she had borne so much more bravely than she guessed of) were over now, at least for her.

"I shall go upstairs presently, Gerard, to make your bedroom pleasant; but Mrs. Cheere has put a fire, so I need not go quite yet," she said, coming, as she spoke, to sit beside him, where she could gaze into his face, without his reading all the yearning and the fear in hers.

"How long will they let you stay with me today?"

"How long, Gerard!" she echoed, with a smile. "For always, now. Do you think I could go anywhere without you now?"

"Lina, will you go back to the old farm, just to see grandfather once again, my pet?"

"Wherever—whenever you take me," she whispered softly, in her new, keen anguish of fear.

"You will find him greatly changed," he went on quietly, leaving her words unnoticed except by the mute gesture of taking in his the small, thin hand, which she had laid caressingly upon his shoulder, "and I know you will never remember any thing beyond his disappointment, and the long punishment of his suspicion; nothing else—nothing against him, dear. And—and he wishes to see you."

"I will go with you; I shall be glad to go *then*," Lina answered, emphasizing the last word.

"Not yet, perhaps; but you will go when you can; it will cheer and comfort the old man, and it will do you good too, dear. I am very glad I saw him; I am very glad I had that happy news to take him. I—I like to remember how his face grew changed and softened while I was there."

In the silence that followed his words, Gerard could hear Lina's quick, pained breathing, but he only drew her hand tighter and closer in his own.

"And you will go to our mother's grave, Lina, and you will have a stone put above with her name on it, just as she saw that name upon the grave when she was married—there, as it is in my sketch. But here—in the chancel here, where the names of all our house have been emblazoned for so many years—hers must have its place. You will have it added, Lina, just below her husband's, with the title and the dates and all. The space is there, you know, and her name should be with his. She loved him, and was his first wife. I owe this to my mother. You will remember?"

"Yes, just as *you* will remember it," she said, still fighting with the fear which was growing more and more cruelly tangible.

"And you will do it for me, dear, just as I should have done it myself?" he added, with a quiet content in his voice. "But there is one thing more that you must promise me. Listen, Lina, and promise it solemnly, for I will not speak of it again. There is the stain of murder upon *my* name, so it must have no place among those of our house. Lina, make me this promise. While that stain rests upon my name (and I know now that it must be always there), no marble or stone shall be engraved for me."

"Gerard," the girl whispered, when she had promised (as she would have promised any thing he asked her), and laying her hand upon his brow, burning now, as it had been chill before, "what has given you this—this cold, I suppose it is?"

"Sometimes I fancy that I caught it that night in the church-yard," he answered, tiredly.

"Sometimes I fancy I have felt it coming on ever since I tried to escape. Don't think of it, love," he added, checking himself suddenly, when he met her troubled eyes. "When will they come to fetch you from me?"

"Miss Marjorie will be here soon, but not to take me from you, Gerard. I can never go."

"Lina," he said, looking up lovingly into her pale face, you look better than you looked that terrible day two months ago; and just as beautiful—more beautiful, I think, my little lily. I almost wonder that the people here who had known Sir Gerard Athelston did not see and remark upon your likeness to him. Could they think the beauty which they boast of, and which fills the house with portraits of him, was a common thing among our Cornish cliffs?"

Then Lina, glad to turn the subject from that other thought, told him of the vague idea of a resemblance which both Sir Neil and his mother had often puzzled over in vain.

"Even Miss Marjorie Castillain," she said, "was struck by it once; but she knew exactly of whose portrait I reminded her."

"Did she?" asked Gerard, thoughtfully. "But of course she never guessed why. Lina, I am so grateful to think that she will always be your friend. Your inheritance will bring you no truer blessing than her friendship, dear. If right had been done us in the years gone by, she—she might have been my friend, too; but it makes a coward of me, even now, to think of the breadth and depth and height of that *if*, while our lives have been— But that is over," he said, again checking himself at sight of the pain upon her face; "and, Lina, you will make up for all when our inheritance is yours. You will make up, as far as you may, for the long years that its owners have wasted. You understand, pet; you will understand it utterly when the power is in your hands. No need to tell my weak wishes to you, when your heart is always tender and warm for those who are poor, or solitary, or mistrusted, as—as we have been, my dear."

"Gerard, hush!—oh, hush!" she sobbed, falling on her knees beside the couch, and throwing her arms about him. "Hush! We will go together—together. If not, I can never go."

"But if the gates of another home—far, far brighter, and far, far more beautiful—are opened for me at the same time, dear," he whispered, softly, "could I choose High Athelston, even if the choice were mine?"

"But, Gerard, those gates are always open. Oh, don't leave me yet!" she cried, in the selfish anguish of this new grief.

"Not yet," he answered, with ineffable tenderness, "but too soon to make it worth while to take possession with you of your home."

"*Your* home, Gerard; you know it is *your* home, even at this moment."

"Not in the eyes of the world; and against I have made it all clear there, I shall be tired, and—and ready to long for possession of the one beyond. Will I wonder how soon I can see Sir Neil? Tell me of them all, Lina, especially of Colonel Stuart."

And she told him all the bright and pleasant things she could remember, while a look of quiet happiness stole into his worn face.

CHAPTER XLI.

MARJORIE DECIDES.

MARJORIE CASTILLAIN had driven Mrs. Esdaile's ponies so far along the Bleaborough road that Mrs. Esdaile's groom, from the seat behind her, felt it at last a duty to remind her where they were. Marjorie acknowledged the reminder with her quiet, pleasant smile, and slowly turned the ponies' heads back toward Churchill. Even when they reached the cottages in Nether Lane, she waited still in her seat, so unwilling was she even yet to disturb the brother and sister.

At last, rousing herself from her long, sad reverie, she gave the reins to the groom, and went up to the door of Mrs. Cheere's cottage.

"Yes, they are together there, Miss Marjorie," said Dorcas, quite gently, in answer to Marjorie's question. "I keep in here quietly; they don't want *me*. I was glad in my heart to be able to help a little when he first came; to put a fire (for he was starved, as if it was December instead of May), and something of that; but I'm not wanted now."

"And you, Jet, have you seen him, dear?" asked Marjorie, with her gentle hand on the child's drooping head.

"He would be there all the time, if he could, Miss Marjorie," said Dorcas, with a wonderful softening smile upon her face; "but we know—Jet and I both know—what quiet is worth for those that are ill and tired. So we wait a bit."

With her own eyes growing a little dim, as she met those of the woman whom she had always known hard and callous until the story of Gerard's life had stirred her, Marjorie turned quietly away, and tapped at the door of the other cottage.

"It is good to have you back, Mr. Spendir," she said, as she stood with her hand in Gerard's; her pitiful eyes betraying, against her will, their sad surprise at the change in him.

"It is good to see you, even for a moment, in this room," he said, a feverish color mounting to his cheeks.

"I will stay a little if you will take your old place," she returned, sitting easily down beside the couch. "Lie back, just as you were lying when I came in, and then I can feel that I may stay more than a moment. I promised to come for Lina; but I know it would be useless to ask her to return with me, unless you came too."

Gratefully Lina smiled her thanks.

"I could not leave Gerard," she answered, almost in a whisper.

"Miss Marjorie," he said, "I have never seen you since you spoke so kindly and so bravely for me in court. May I thank you now? for the remembrance of your words is as clear to me yet as it was on that first day. And I want to tell you how I did it—yes, please let me; I want to tell it you myself; the rest—all about this last journey of mine, and its result—Magdalen will tell you afterward. We fought together, as they said, on the very brink of the pool. We had met there, and, in our anger and impatience, we hardly heeded where we stood. We fought equally, as the world would say—he had the greater skill and I the greater strength—but often and often since then—*always* since then—I have known that I had no real excuse in God's sight.

for that deed, hardly more than I should have had if I had *known* that I flung him to his death."

"We all understand—" began Marjorie, earnestly; but he stopped her with a quick, beseeching glance.

"No, please, don't excuse me. I can have no excuse to offer presently before the Judgment-seat above. I had my own work to do; why did I think of his? Miss Marjorie," he continued, presently, "I should like you to know how often you lightened that work for me, and brightened the life I led here, giving me a little glimpse of what other men's lives hold."

"And I want to tell you, Gerard"—Marjorie spoke in grave and unaffected simplicity, as if she knew this talk between them was no ordinary talk, and needed no ordinary forms—"how you have helped me (without knowing it) in making my own life a little less useless. But—but, after all, I can not tell it you, I see. Gerard," she broke off, "you have found that church, and proved Sir Gerard's first marriage. I knew what you went to do, and I have been almost as anxious as Lina. I can see that you have succeeded, and I expected it, for I always felt the story was a true one. Ah, how different all our lives might have been, if this truth had never falsely and wickedly been concealed! But I must not stay longer and weary you," she added, seeing how the feverish color came and went upon his worn and tired face. Some time you will let me come again."

"I wish," said Gerard, leaning against the couch, when he rose to bid her good-bye, and speaking with grave earnestness; "I wish I felt sure you would be happy when—when you bear my mother's name. Let me think of it as my mother's name, Miss Marjorie, and to be one day yours! I wish I felt quite sure you would be happy then."

"How?" exclaimed Marjorie, while a bright flush mounted to the very roots of her hair. "Your wife will be Lady Athelston, Gerard."

He looked into her face, with a little of the old warm happiness in his eyes.

"It would not be worth while taking the title from Sir Neil, just for such a little while," he said; "it would only have to go back to him. And his wife, and his son's wife, and *his* son's wife, on and on, will be those who will wear my mother's title, though so much that has always gone with it must now go to Lina. I like to think of *you* wearing it, Miss Castillain. I—I only wish I knew or felt sure that it would bring you a great happiness, such as life sometimes holds for such as you."

"I wish you would never think of me as I am going to be," said Marjorie, with her rare wistfulness, "but always as what I am."

"I can not help thinking of the one, and trying to picture the other," Gerard answered. "I do so little now, that my dreams and idle fancies have all their own way, and I try to picture the future of those who have been so kind to me. Like Orlando—isn't it, Miss Marjorie?—I have been able to 'look into happiness through other men's eyes.'"

"If you ever care to fancy what *my* life will be, Gerard," the girl said, very softly, and almost solemnly, as she laid her hand in his, "I hope it *will make the fancy brighter* for you to know that it can never be so listless and heedless a life again as it always had been until I knew you and Lina. And you must *never* picture it as spent with Neil, for I never shall be Lady Athelston."

A startled surprise, almost amounting to pain, had at first filled Gerard's eyes as she spoke, and no answering words rose to his lips. Lina's heart beat painfully in the short, deep silence, the meaning of which neither of the girls could, either then or afterward, even faintly comprehend.

"Gerard, are you so sorry?" his sister asked, at last, only anxious for him to break this pause.

"So glad," he answered, just in his old, clear, happy tones, and now with all the old gladness in his smile.

Then Marjorie bid good-bye, and went; and as she drove slowly back, in the calm sunset light, her thoughts lingered still with the brother and sister, and she had no need to hide their sadness and hopelessness now, as she always would when any eyes could read and interpret them.

"How hard it was," she whispered to herself, as she turned the ponies slowly into the lawn at The Anchorage, "to hide from Lina the shock I felt at the first sight of him! Ah! the long anxiety, and the ceaseless work, and the meagre life, have told upon him now, as well as that horrible confinement before March. What can be done to counteract all these?"

And no smile came to Marjorie's face, even when Jack Esdaile ran up and sprung beside her in the carriage. The wheels rolled on lightly over the gravel. The rich, sweet breath of the hawthorn made the air fragrant around her. The red light, lingering in the western sky, shone dazzlingly on all the windows of the low, white house she loved as she had never loved her home. Upon the steps, against the rich background of clustering roses, Colonel Stuart stood waiting to receive her. And still Marjorie's face was grave and thoughtful, and, without giving up the reins, or leaving her seat when the ponies stopped, she asked if she might drive on to Hawkedale.

"Tell William to take his seat again, Colonel Stuart," she pleaded, with a glance at the groom, "and I will send the phaeton back by him."

"You may stay at home now, William," the colonel said; "I am going to drive on. Jack, run in, and, when those ladies are gone, tell mamma that I am taking Miss Marjorie home, and that Miss Chester is not coming back to-day. Say that Marjorie is coming again to-morrow, and that I will tell her every thing else when I return."

"Now, Miss Marjorie, will you tell me of them?" he asked, when she had moved her seat, and he had taken the reins.

So she told him all she thought of Gerard; all the hopeless thoughts which she had hidden before.

"It will weary him for me to go to-night," he said; "but I must bring him home with me in the morning. Rest and ease, with care and nourishment, will soon do their work in restoring a fine frame and constitution such as his."

"They may—please God they will," said the girl, still with the rare, sweet gravity upon her face which Colonel Stuart so often pondered over now.

"There is one thing which I must do at once," mused Marjorie through that solitary evening—

for Mr. Castillain and his elder daughter were dining at Burton—"I must tell Neil what I told Sir Gerard Athelston—how funny it sounds! —this evening. It is due to him to know (now that others know it) how I can never be his wife. I will write to him in the morning. I fancy he must know—because now he understands what real love is—how impossible it would be that he and I should marry. He and I! so impossible it is; and he will see this as I see it, now that he knows how ungovernable one's love is."

CHAPTER XLII.

NEIL AND MARJORIE TELL THE TRUTH.

Colonel Stuart had been at the cottage all the morning, but had not taken Gerard and Lina back with him to The Anchorage, as he had intended, for Gerard was not fit to be removed. The colonel had sent at once for a physician from Bleaborough; but the chief prescription had been for rest, and the chief words had been pitying ones for Lina, when she read the hopelessness which his simple directions betrayed. And now the colonel had sauntered down the lane with him toward The Anchorage, where his carriage waited, and where he was to lunch.

"Did you send and ask Sir Neil Athelston to come, Lina?" asked Gerard, when they had been some time alone.

"Yes, dear. Jet went. It pleases him to do any thing for you. It seems his only pleasure just now."

"Dear little fellow," Gerard said, smiling as he used to smile upon the child. "It is such a joy to me to think he will be cared for always. His grandmother loves him really—doesn't she, Lina?—and you will have the power to do all that money can do for him, and the love to do it as no one else could. Lina, he is not like his father, is he?—is he, dear?"

The wistful questioning of the weak, low voice went to Lina's heart. She seemed to see, for the first time, how anxiously he had brought the child up in their poverty, looking always forward to his manhood.

"I should think his father, as a boy, must have been as unlike Jet as it is possible for any boy to have been," she answered, confidently.

"I think so—I hope so. I wish Sir Neil would come."

Then, almost as the words were uttered, Lina heard Sir Neil's step on the garden path. He came in quietly, a resolute look upon his face, such as Gerard had never seen there before.

"I did not know you were so ill," he said, standing beside the couch, and slowly withdrawing his eyes from Lina.

Then he ran his fingers through his curls, and looked longingly at the hat which he had taken off and put down as he entered; for Lina was gone now, and he was alone with the man of whom he had thought with contempt through many months, and it was no use trying to think of him with contempt now; and—and—what could he say? What had he been brought there to say? Why had Lina gone away, and where was she?

Lying on the bed upstairs was Lina, with her face hidden. To lie so, in silent, solitary prayer, was a rest unspeakable for the anxious girl, and so she did not move until the sound of the opening door reached her. Then she rose, drawing her hand a moment across her tired eyes, and went down-stairs again to take her place by Gerard's couch.

"Lina, Sir Neil bid me wish you good-bye. He would have liked to see you, but I knew you would not wish to come."

"No, Gerard."

Then there was a silence between them, which Gerard broke at last, with an anxious questioning in his voice.

"Magdalen, Sir Neil will not believe that you refuse to take, at once, the home and wealth that you inherit legally."

"*Never* without you, Gerard," she cried, in quick dissent.

"It is too late for me, dear. I told Sir Neil exactly what you said," he added, presently, almost as if in haste to break her silence; "and, Lina, he refused to take advantage of my death. He must have the title—he knows that, though he didn't mention it—but he resigns every thing else. Are you surprised?"

"Yes," she answered, quietly, "very much surprised—even now."

"Even now!" he echoed, with a smile. "Then it does not surprise you *now*, quite as it would have done some time ago?"

"No."

"He is going away, Lina," her brother said, watching her anxiously as he spoke. "His mother has a small estate in Scotland, and he says he shall go there. It is a farm smaller than many on the estate here, he says; but he shall find plenty to do; and he is going at once. He was making light of it all, but I don't know how far he meant it. I showed him the copy of our mother's marriage register, but he would not read it. He turned his eyes away, and then began to speak to me of you."

"Gerard dear, rest now," said Lina, tenderly laying her cool little hand upon his forehead; "you have talked so much. Let me read to you."

"Not quite yet; I want to tell you all before I rest. Sir Neil told me how long he had loved you, and how deeply; though you would never listen to him. He told me how wrong he knew he had been in telling you of this love while he was engaged to Miss Castillain, but how he had let it master him in his selfishness and idleness. He said that it would live through all his life, and that he should tell this at once to Miss Castillain; but that he should never mention it again to pain *you*. He knew himself unworthy of you —he had known it for long, he said—but his love had grown so strong within him that he could not root it out now; and then, more earnestly than I had fancied he could ever speak, he begged me to persuade you to go home to High Athelston as its mistress, and to give his mother a home with you there. Lina, how strange it was to hear this from his lips, I can not say. Dear, will you go?"

"Oh! Gerard, hush!—please, hush!" she entreated. "Let us be together."

"Sir Neil wants High Athelston to have its own mistress," he went on, as if by a great effort, "and to be ruled and governed only by her orders; and he will have the truth made known

at once; though I pleaded that it should lie with us at present, because I shall never have a claim to make, and you do not wish to make one—while I am—with you. I hope he will be persuaded by Colonel Stuart, as he will not listen to me. It will make little difference, after all, if your home is his mother's still—as it would naturally be—for he will all his life be the baronet, Lina."

"Oh, Gerard," she interrupted, the cry wrung from her in her sore fear and pain, "I can not bear this! Oh, if God will only leave us together, or take us together! Gerard, I dare not lose you; do not talk of that time."

"Pet," he said, with a flash of the old brightness in his eyes, "I want you to give me one of the blocks from that drawer—a prepared one, and a well-pointed pencil. It is *so* long since my fingers have been at their old task, and just now I feel as if they had their old strength and power. May I try?"

She brought him the block and pencil, standing by in speechless hope to see him take them in his hands. A few nervous strokes he drew; then, with a little laugh, he held the block more firmly, and bent above it, trying with intense care to make some of his old touches of delicate shadowing.

"No," he said, after a few minutes' effort, looking up into his sister's disappointed eyes; "no, the strokes will not come as I wish them. Look at these wild outlines."

"They remind me of our own Cornish cliffs," she said, brokenly, crushing back her tears.

"Do they?" he asked, absently. "Lina, do you remember that last day in Cornwall—our birthday—when we went to the islands? And do you remember what Miss Castillain said of them on the day you found me by the mountain lake?"

"Yes, I remember it all," whispered Lina, "and the bright picture Colonel Stuart gave us afterward. I remember that day so well, and how you worked among us while we idled there."

"Oh, Lina, if it had only been told me that day, as it was told to you, that under the waters of that quiet little pool there lurked a certain death!"

"Shall I put away the block?" she asked, gently turning that subject aside.

"Yes, I can not do it, though I fancied so wildly that I could. Yes, take it, dear. It is not a very manly thing to own to, is it?—but I am tired, really tired. Lina, what is that hymn which tells us that the rest will be longer than the toil? Oh! such a recompense! Short toil—eternal rest. Can you sing it to me?"

While she sung, sweetly and softly, sitting beside him with his hand in hers, and her eyes turned from his patient, resting face, Neil Athelston walked rapidly to Hawkedale, and asked to see Marjorie. She should hear the truth at last from his own lips—the truth so long kept hidden in his cowardice.

Miss Marjorie was alone in the drawing-room. So the old servant said; and Neil, with the privilege of her affianced husband, entered the room unannounced. Marjorie was writing at her desk, but when she saw him she rose with a smile.

"Neil!—how strange! I was just then writing to you."

Week after week, month after month, they had put off telling of the conviction which had been growing so strong within them; and now the reserve had broken for both on the same day. Without seeing a word of the letter, Neil knew what she had written; and before a word passed his lips, Marjorie knew what he had come to say. And they looked into each other's eyes, and at that moment understood each other, as they had never done through all the years that they had been betrothed.

"Marjorie, I think you know what I have come to say," he began, humbly; "you look as if you knew it, dear; but, in any case, I must tell you now. Marjorie, my faith and fealty to you have been, for a whole year, worthless—worthless as all belonging to me has been. I will not tell you how earnestly I hope it will be different now; what right have I to believe that you care? I will not tell you that your own life will be happier spent apart from mine; what right have I to speak of that? I can only tell you the simple truth. I have let a new love fill my heart. I have learned now that the affection I offered you was not what I thought it was, and what it ought to have been. Marjorie, you know who has worked this change in me. Lina—Athelston will never accept the love which I pressed upon her when I insulted her in every such word I uttered, but it must be hers always now; and—and knowing its strength within me, I know it is the only love which I can offer my wife."

"Yes, I know it too," said Marjorie, in her ready, genial tones, but with a gentle compassion in her eyes. "I am so glad you have told me this yourself, Neil; I have been long hoping you would do so. I knew what you had to tell, but I would not say it for you. I waited for you to tell it me yourself."

"And you saw how cowardly I was in shrinking from this?"

"Yes, Neil," she answered, brightly; "and I was cowardly myself, too. How could I be sure that papa would not advertise, 'I do hereby give notice that I disown my daughter Marjorie, in consequence of her disobedience in the matter of taking a husband.' I saw just such an advertisement yesterday in an old register; and it sounded very like papa. Just think what my chances would have been after that! Neil, aren't you afraid of a similar act on the part of your mother? If Lady Athelston would only marry papa now, they might work out personally their own ends and aims! 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished, don't you think?"

"It would hardly consummate their own ends, would it?" asked Neil, too really grave to enter into the spirit of her words, and too really fond of her to bear this separation lightly, as she seemed to do. "High Athelston was to be the gainer by *our* marriage, Marjorie—High Athelston and its master."

"Thank you, Neil," she answered, quietly; "but our parents' schemes have gone agley—as the best laid will, you know, whether of mice or men—or even women. Our loves were beyond their reach, little as they imagined it."

"Marjorie," said Neil, thinking it best to say as little as he could of either Mr. Castillain or Lady Athelston, while his thoughts were so sore, "it is sorrowful work saying good-bye to you."

"Where are you going, Neil?"

She asked it anxiously, but with very little surprise. She knew that he was not even now the real master of High Athelston, and she could sympathize with his crushed ambition as well as with his hopeless love.

"To Scotland, Marjorie. Where else could I go? What other home have I a right to claim?"

"I hope it is not to be a very long good-bye," she said, with a smile, as she gave him her hand. "I shall miss you greatly; we are such old friends, are not we? Don't stay away from us all very long. Neil"—the young voice which had struggled to be cheery grew low and sad again—"have you seen Lina and her brother to-day?"

"Yes, I saw her for a moment; she soon went away, as she always does from me. He sent for me, and I was with him while he told me—all that he had to tell," he added, hurriedly.

"It is sad to see him, is not it?" asked Marjorie, showing in her face how well she understood what this *all* was. "He used to look so strong and stalwart, one can not help thinking what a long course of hard work and self-denial it must have been which has brought him to this; and one can not help fretting over it. Yet he does not; he seems as brave and ready to meet death, Neil, as he was brave and ready to meet the trials of his life."

"Colonel Stuart was going back to him when I came away, Marjorie," he said, avoiding a direct answer to her words; "I am glad he is so true a friend to them both. It struck me from the first as such a characteristic of Stuart that he should be the one to have helped"—not yet could he bring himself to utter Gerard's name naturally enough to venture it to Marjorie—"to have helped in the gathering of that sum which was to have repaid the imaginary debt to old Mr. Esdaile."

"Yes, just characteristic of him," replied Marjorie, with a wonderful, quiet gladness in her eyes.

Then they bid good-bye—a good-bye the memory of which was pleasant to them both through all the after-years. And Neil fancied, as he walked slowly back on the familiar way, that if Sir Gerard Athelston's son had inherited his rightful name and home, the fulfillment of old Mr. Castillain's pet scheme would have been easier to Marjorie.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE GATE OF TEARS.

THE greater part of each day was spent by Marjorie Castillain, and Colonel Stuart or Mrs. Esdaile, at the cottage in Nether Lane. No one else could share Lina's grief; at the coming of no one else did Gerard's face brighten as it brightened at the coming of these friends who had been his friends through all. Still, they knew that there were hours and hours when he would be happier alone with his sister, and then they never intruded into the silent room. Sometimes, for a whole morning, Marjorie would sit down-stairs talking to, or quietly helping, Mrs. Cheere (who took the work of the house, as well as the work of the hired nurse, upon herself, and, both mentally and bodily, "went softly"), and then would walk homeward, only having left a silent kiss on Lina's lips, and a whispered word or two for Gerard. But there were other times, when she would linger in his room for hours, with that bright sense of ease which peculiarly belonged to Marjorie, and made her seem at home wherever she might be.

It was on the last morning in May that Colonel Stuart, buried in anxious thought, walked alone to the cottage. He had spent most of the previous night beside Gerard's bed, and he knew that the end was drawing near. It would be a calm and peaceful end; but none the less sad for those who witnessed it, and who knew what the solitude afterward would be for the twin-sister.

So Colonel Stuart was thinking, when he reached the cottage-door, and looked down upon a pitiful little object. Jet, with his head held tightly in his hands, was sobbing without a sound, while his whole frame shook and trembled in the emotion which was unchild-like in its intensity.

Colonel Stuart, with his arm about the shaking little form, was whispering his few cheering words of comfort, when Lady Athelston came through the cottage-door, her face unusually pale, and with the mark of tears still on it. He turned to walk with her down the garden; then, in his quiet, soothing way, he asked for Neil.

"He is gone," she answered, understanding this question, as he knew she would, from the motion of his lips, "and I am desolate without him. But Miss Chester is coming back—some day—when— Oh, I have felt so miserable in there! He ought to be at High Athelston. If he is to die, he should die at High Athelston! Should not it be so, Alick?"

"It matters little," he answered, with a smile she could understand, whether she guessed rightly at the words or not.

"Colonel Stuart," she said, "you will not go up to him? He has been disturbed much to-day; and is very tired, Marjorie says. She herself is waiting down-stairs. See! she is sitting at the window there, and will not go up unless she is called."

"I understand," he said. "I will walk a little way with you, Lady Athelston."

Whether she heard his answer or not, she was glad to take his offered arm; for the tears and distress of this morning had left her weaker even than usual, and, with a feeling of unwonted delicacy, she had come alone.

Even when he returned, after leaving her at the entrance to the park, Colonel Stuart saw that Marjorie still sat beside the window; but her head was not bent now: it was raised as if she listened to some sound far off. So he paused a minute at the gate, looking thoughtfully away among the shadows of the overarching elm-boughs, and just then Dorcas came from the cottage behind him, and throwing her arms about the sorrowing child, she took him tenderly into her own home, and closed the door upon their weeping.

Upstairs, in the room where Gerard lay, the silence had been the hush of peace, and not despair. Lina's eyes, as she sat beside him, were fixed upon his face with a yearning that was unutterably sad in its intensity; but his were far away just then, out among the sunlit leaves and pure white clouds; and the yearning that was in *them* had no sadness in it.

They were both silent, as they were so often now, in that hushed, expectant silence in which the living and the dying feel so keenly the great gulf between them, yet feel so mercifully the one Hope which spans this gulf.

It was Gerard who broke the silence at last, speaking softly, as his eyes came back from their long gaze, and rested on the pale and wistful face beside him.

"Lina, I am so glad, so very glad that you have consented to go back—I mean to go home—to High Athelston."

"You asked me, Gerard," she said, wearily. "Can I do any thing but what you wish?"

"Lady Athelston is really fond of you, my pet," he went on, seeking for all the comfort that the thought could give them, "really fond of you; and I can see a happy life in store for you—a happy life such as you have never known, my little sister."

She tried to answer brightly the tender questioning of his eyes, but she could not.

"Lina," he said, presently, "I want—I want you to give me my Order of License; my ticket of leave, I mean, dear. It is always in a hidden pocket of my coat. I had to carry it about with me, and I always made the pocket myself: such a cheery task, Lina."

One passionate, grievous sob burst impetuously from the girl's heart as she rose and looked where he bid her. Never had she seen the paper she sought, and now, of all times, how could she bear to look upon it? Tightly she clasped her fingers round the folded sheet, and brought it to him with her face averted.

"Even now, can it give you pain to look upon it?" he asked, with a smile which showed how little pain it could give him. "Why, Lina, if it had not been given me, where should I have been now? Not here with you, my darling. Eight years, this order says, and not six of them have passed yet. I should have been there still but for this paper which you will not look upon. Yet even I, Lina, until to-day, have not dared to open it since it was given me. I felt that if I saw the words before my eyes, I must tear them into atoms. But now it is different. I think I could read them now."

He held the paper open in his hands and tried to follow the words. Lina had buried her face upon the bed, and did not see how the effort failed.

"The lines swim before me," he said, shading his eyes with one hand. "What is it, Lina? 'Her Majesty is graciously pleased to grant to Gerard Dymocke, who was convicted of Forgery at the—' No, I can not read that; for it brings back, even yet, the isolation and the constant weariness, and, above all, the terrible degradation. But what is this, Lina, above the seal? 'And her Majesty hereby orders that the said Gerard Dymocke be set at liberty within thirty days from the date of this order.' How well I remember those thirty days, Lina! The man who worked next me had no such liberation to look forward to; and so I used—"

"Oh, hush, hush!" cried Lina, raising her anguished face, and passionately crushing the parchment under her fingers. "Oh, Gerard, I dare not remember that time—to-day."

"For me," said Gerard, softly, "it should be good to remember it to-day. The liberty was given me for—" He broke off suddenly, seeing her piteous suffering. "Lina, I will think of it no more. Will you burn that for me? I need it no longer. Let me see you destroy it."

And she burned it; standing to watch it consume because he watched it, though she did so in a passion of weeping which she tried in vain to suppress.

"My dear, my dear, the greatest grief through all was, that *you* should have to bear the dishonor I had brought on this name of ours; and that you must fight alone that battle of life which I once felt so strong to fight for you. Oh, Lina, what a shattered plan mine is! But, darling, even of these fragments One Hand can make a perfect plan at last; and *you* will do the work for which I was not worthy."

"Gerard, Gerard, I can not bear it! Oh, my brother, talk of other things!"

A little silent pause, while her face was hidden on his wasted hands; then he spoke with his old brightness, only the tones were so low and weak:

"Lina, do you remember the first time I took you out to sea alone, and how I could not frighten you?"

"You never could frighten me, Gerard."

Not a word more of the separation that was coming; not a word more of the life she was to live without him; only loving, cheery memories now of that life which they had spent together long ago before the clouds had gathered about them. And the anguished weeping ceased at last, and the girl's eyes (brave in their grief) could look again, without their blinding tears, into the patient ones upon the pillows.

Higher and higher rose the sun, in all the brilliance of its morning strength.

"Lina, I want to see Jet once more."

"He is here, dear Gerard. I will fetch him, if you are not too tired now."

"Not—not too tired."

Jet came in, treading softly, and with his small hands tightly locked before him, in the determination to hold back his tears, at cost of any struggle. And then the young man and the child looked into each other's eyes, until there grew there the old, quiet light of laughter which had been so familiar in the busy days which they had spent together in these little rooms.

"Laddie," said Gerard, presently, with a beautiful, tender smile, which the child never could forget through all his life, and, kissing the sorrowful little face as men but rarely kiss, "don't forget me. Try not ever *quite* to forget me, and some day we shall find each other again—and know each other, I hope—in our Father's home. Good-bye, laddie; kiss me once again—the last of the kisses that used to be so pleasant to me."

And still the child could keep back his tears, while he stood there, knowing he looked his last upon the man who had taken him generously into his warm heart, when there was no one else in all the world to do so; but Gerard heard the sobs burst forth beyond restraint when Lina led the boy tenderly away.

The sun rose higher still, strong and untiring in its course, and the bright spring day was nearly in the zenith of its beauty.

"Lina," said Gerard, as he lay looking out into the far, calm blue beyond the floating clouds, "long ago, in those weary days among the convicts, I used to get weak and tired sometimes at

nights—not often, dear, but sometimes; so exhausted that I used to fancy the possibility of dying there, and—to fear it, Lina. I feared the agony of death itself; I feared the—the judgment afterward; fancying God's verdict might be what man's had been. Now all fear is gone. I know how He who is the highest in judgment does not judge us as we judge each other. So I have no fear, my darling—only peace. Is not this knowledge worth the pain which taught it me, dear little sister—the pain which is not great for me to-day?"

But she could not answer the words whose truth was so intense, even while they were uttered in physical pain.

"I will not ask you to read again," he said, touching the Book which lay upon the bed, and looking sadly into her wide and pitiful eyes; "but will you sing to me? I love to hear your voice, my darling. Sing of the Kindly Light."

The last notes died softly in the hush, and Gerard's thoughts seemed far away—as far, perhaps, as where was breaking, even now, that morn of which she had been telling.

"Lina," he said presently, turning to her with his own bright smile, "you remember how we sung together, in the old days when we fancied we were very lonely children—lonely with each other! Oh, how often have some of the words come back to me in your own dear voice! I should like to sing with you once again if I can. Will you begin, darling? You know the hymn you spoke of last night."

Gazing out among the sunny leaves, because she could not trust herself to look into his face now, Lina sung,

"Art thou weary, art thou languid,
Art thou sore distressed?"

And he, his white lips weak and tremulous, took up the words and notes, and softly sung the answer,

"Come to me, saith One, and, coming,
Be at rest."

Through each verse those answering lines grew fainter and fainter, while Lina's sweet tones struggled through her tears,

"If I find Him, if I follow,
What His guerdon here?"

A very whisper now was the answer from the sinking voice,

"Many a sorrow, many a labor,
Many a tear."

Softly Lina's question followed,

"If I still hold closely to Him,
What hath He at last?"

"Sorrow vanquished, labor—ended—"

Lina, in a very passion of weeping, hid her face upon the bed now, for the dying voice had ceased.

The sun had risen to its midday height, and was shining in its fullest splendor, and in the meridian of its strength and power. Both Gerard's weak hands were clasped in Lina's, and she spoke to him softly and wistfully, as if, in the hush of the angel's presence, she could detain him by her clinging, sorrowing love. And he looked into her face with a light in his eyes more beautiful than any smile, but he could not speak, for his breath was slow and failing now.

And then, as she looked, he fancied that her kneeling figure and her yearning face were drifting from him slowly, slowly; that the room was widening for him into infinite space. And then the angel stood between them.

All over now, and there was rest unspeakable for Gerard. Only twenty-eight! But there are many men who tell their fourscore years, and yet live less than he. Only twenty-eight! But He who closed the tired eyes before the sun began to sink, knew how the burden and heat of the day had been borne.

CHAPTER XLIV.

WANTED, NEXT OF KIN.

"NEXT OF KIN.—JELFREY. The next of kin of Eustace Jelfrey, who died in Africa, are requested to communicate with Messrs. Beard and Cartwright, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

That was the advertisement which attracted the attention of both Colonel Stuart and Marjorie Castillain on the very morning of Gerard's death, neither of whom, however, broke in upon Lina's solitary grief to show it to her.

By the same day's post, the colonel wrote to Messrs. Beard and Cartwright, describing Jet's relationship to Eustace Jelfrey, asking for further particulars, and inclosing the address of his own solicitors. The reply was to the effect that the particulars which Colonel Stuart had kindly furnished had been forwarded by Messrs. Beard and Cartwright to their client, whose further commands they awaited.

"We will not show it to Lina, nor tell her we have written, until a further answer comes, Marjorie," Mrs. Esdaile said. "Only you and I and Alick know, and we may save her disappointment."

On the very day after Gerard's funeral, Lina started for Cornwall, and Mrs. Cheere and Jet accompanied her. She was very glad of this. She was not yet strong enough to bear the responsibility, as well as the fatigue, of traveling; and it was much better for her to have the care and attention of the woman who had grown to love her for her brother's sake, than those of a maid. As for the child, she was glad indeed to have him with her, for she loved him for her brother's sake, and she longed for her grandfather to know Gerard's boy. So the thoughtful plan, concocted between Marjorie and Dorcas, succeeded admirably; and the fatigue of the journey, as well as the duties which awaited her at Tresean, were lightened wonderfully by Mrs. Cheere. They were lightened even by Jet, too, for the teaching of childhood had fitted him well for such tasks as he now loved to perform for Lina and her sick grandfather.

More than three weeks Hiram Dymocke lived, through Lina's ever-watchful, ever-tender nursing; then he died peacefully, with his wife's name upon his lips, and the hand of his daughter's child in his. And when the old man's will was read, it was found that, at the earnest desire of his granddaughter, he had left all which by right she should have inherited to the adopted child of his late grandson, to be invested for him, as his guardians approved, but not used till he came of age. Then a grave in the church-yard

(far removed from that one beneath the wall, which was no longer nameless) was closed for the last time, and Hiram Dymocke lay beside his wife; the clouds and suspicions which had separated them for years all scattered and melted now.

On their return to Highshire, Mrs. Cheere and Jet settled quietly down again in the white cottage in Nether Lane, and Lina took up her abode with Lady Athelston at High Athelston. It cost her a great struggle to do this, because she knew her presence would keep the mother and son apart; still, she could not forget that she had promised Lady Athelston, in Gerard's presence, nor could she pretend to be ignorant that it would be a relief to Neil's mother to have her to depend upon once more; nor how she, too, longed in her loneliness to be near those few true, tried friends, who had been so kind to her and to Gerard.

So she went, and the weeks passed on until the autumn-time, bringing no changes but those subtle ones which we pass by almost unnoticed. Lina was indeed like a daughter to Lady Athelston, giving her a daughter's care, almost a daughter's love, and quite a daughter's obedience. No one knew what useless, though pleasantly sustained, frauds were her grave consultations with Lady Athelston, when any plans were mooted for the estates or tenantry; and those pet speeches of the little real mistress of the house.

"I will ask Lady Athelston what she will wish done;" "I will speak to your mistress, and let you know what she decides." No one knew what hollow little fictions were those orders which she represented as Sir Neil's, when the agents told her he refused to give any directions by letter, and always referred them to her. No one, on all the estate, knew what an absolute little mistress Lina was made to be, even while she gave these commands which purported to be Sir Neil's or Lady Athelston's; nor was any one ever allowed to see Lady Athelston's utter dependence upon her. With noble, womanly, delicate tact, Lina hid this, while she did, most anxiously, all she could do in her new and trying position.

It was not often that Sir Neil wrote to her—rarely, except in answer to those letters which asked for his wishes in certain matters—but when he did, he could make his letters pleasant to her; and he never let them speak one word of love, or of disappointment, or of dissatisfaction for his isolated life. They were always simple and manly, but nothing more; for Neil had never possessed Gerard's hopefulness and bright content.

Colonel Stuart had, two or three times, been to see him in Scotland, and had always brought back a cheery description of his farm and his busy life.

"It is a model farm, even for Scotland," he used to say; "and Neil is always doing something; not that Neil, even yet, knows very much about it all; but he is steadily determined to learn, and he does not shun work. It is more praise, too, than you can imagine it to be, when his bailiff (himself an educated fellow, and an experienced farmer) pronounces him improving."

"Poor Neil!"

"Not poor," the colonel would answer, smiling at Marjorie's pet term; "there is no *poor look about him. He looks* twice as well—and as *handsome, too—as* he used to look lounging in the billiard-room and drawing-rooms at High Athelston; and if his hands are not so white and soft as when he drove his favorites in Hyde Park, I can tell you they have gained in strength and skill."

Marjorie's letters to Neil were more frequent than Lina's, and longer by far. She loved to send him droll pictures of old familiar places and people; comical incidents of her own home life; long, chatty accounts of life at High Athelston, and every little bit of news she could gather. So well she knew what a trial was this new life for him, after the gayety and splendor and adulation of his whole past existence! So well she understood how hungry he would be for home news now! But amusing as her letters were, they always helped him, too; strengthening him, and cheering him, as well as giving him just that relief of hope which they were intended to give. And when he told her so, and thanked her, he pleased her as no words of his had ever pleased her in the old days of their betrothal.

It was to him that Marjorie was writing on a certain autumn day, when Lina entered the library and sat down to rest beside the fire. Marjorie was staying at High Athelston, as she often staid even now, for Lady Athelston and Lina both loved to have her there, and knew, too, that her own home was even less bright for her than it used to be. Before she finished her letter, she turned and spoke to Lina.

"Any message for Neil?"

"I was just thinking of him," the girl answered, simply; "I suppose because I guessed to whom you were writing; or—perhaps because his mother has been talking of him, and wanting him."

"It would be so much better for him to come home, wouldn't it?" asked Marjorie, waiting eagerly for the reply.

"I don't know. He knows best."

"Do you tell him how his mother frets for him, Lina, and how her strength fails?"

"Yes, when I write."

"I suppose, then," returned Marjorie, with a little sigh, "that he is too busy to come. Colonel Stuart says he is always busy. Busy!—I can not tack the word to Neil in my mind even yet. Colonel Stuart is going to Scotland to-night."

"Why?" asked Lina, involuntarily.

"I do not know," was the slow answer; "unless he goes to see Neil. He would hardly start off on a couple of days' visit to that distance to any one else, would he? Yet I don't know, he has so many friends and fellow-officers scattered over the kingdom. I am glad he is going away for a little, because he seems to be growing so quiet here. He has not cared to join in our petty gayeties lately, as he always used to do."

"Yet he is just the same," returned Lina, earnestly, "kind and good and helpful to all."

"Yes; he could not be otherwise. Why, he makes even Hawkedale pleasant when he is there; and it is not, you are well aware, a naturally pleasant place, less so than ever now. Papa still refuses to believe that my engagement with Neil is canceled, and insists on talking of it, on purpose to prevent the possibility of any one imagining it over. And he *makes* me listen to him until I burn with shame. Oh, Lina, it is so bitterly humiliating! and there is nothing in

life to make up for it. Even you, my lonely child, are scarcely so unutterably lonely as I am. You are of use, and you are loved, although you have no relations. I am neither, though I have father and sister. But you are good; *that* must make all the difference."

Such a speech from Marjorie struck Lina as sadly as desponding words always do strike us from lips that are used to fun and laughter.

"I wish sometimes," continued Marjorie, very low, "that they would drift away—all the wearisome things around me, all the wearisome tasks before me—that it would all be over, Lina."

"Oh, Marjorie, I am so grieved to see you sad!" she whispered, lovingly. "This mood is so unlike you."

"Unlike! Why? Because I am one of those thoughtless girls who never seem to know what gloom is?" asked Marjorie, with a quick laugh. "Why, we are just the very ones who suffer most from this dismal mood—what shall I call it—reaction? Just the very ones to suffer most heavily and despondently, when we do suffer from it at all. But it will soon pass with me; for it had no business to come; and I am not, even yet, quite the one to nurse such a feeling, though it may master me for the time. I shall—ah, Lina, you are sent for. Lady Athelston has not given you a long recess, has she? While you are away, I will finish my letter; then, if you are not here, I will come to you."

But Marjorie seemed in no hurry to finish the letter. Left alone, she leaned her head on her hands, and let her thoughts have their own way. Sad enough these thoughts were, as minute after minute she sat there, alone and listless.

"I will try, I will try to be better," she whispered to herself at last, raising her head and pushing the hair from her temples; "I will try, and then I shall be happy—at least I suppose so. Louie will be married soon, and then perhaps papa will be kinder to me, as I shall be the only daughter he will have with him. Poor Louie!" sighed the girl, with a look of real pity in her eyes; "I would rather, ten hundred times, live alone with papa at Hawkedale, than marry such a poor little vain nonentity as Lord Lythwood. Poor Louie! But—but how sad it has been ever since Gerard Athelston's death!"

"Colonel Stuart."

He came forward, with his easy at-homeness, as Martin closed the door upon him; but Marjorie felt the color rise in her face as it had never done before at his approach—almost as if she had been detected in wanting him.

"I am going to Scotland, Miss Marjorie," he said, standing at the fire, with his back to the desk on which her unfinished letter lay, "and I want to know if you have any message to intrust to me for Neil. I am going to try to bring him home with me."

Frankly the girl met the searching glance bent upon her.

"I do not think he will come," she answered, simply.

"May I not take him what he is waiting for, Miss Marjorie—the assurance of your wish to see him?"

"Mine?" she echoed, the ready color rising once again, and her eyes drooping, with a rare shyness, beneath his questioning gaze. "You are —*mistaken; he does not wait* for mine, Colonel Stuart. Neil Athelston and I have broken that long engagement of ours."

"But—but your father says that report is false."

"Yes, I know he does," replied Marjorie, quietly. "It is his pleasure to say it, and insist on it; but that can never piece the broken thread again. Have you known the squire so long, Colonel Stuart, to be now surprised by his insisting that I have no mind of my own?"

There was a laugh upon her lips, though a tremulous one; but his were very grave indeed, and his eyes intent upon her as he spoke again.

"Miss Marjorie, have I been wrong in my fancy all this while, that Neil's loss of wealth could make no difference in *your* love for him?"

"Such a fancy, whether it has been yours or not, could not be wrong," she answered, quietly. "No loss of wealth could have made *any* difference in my love for him, if love had been really love on either side. But it was not. Can you understand? The knowledge of this has been slow in asserting itself to either of us, but it has been almost always there. It would have been told nearly two years ago, only that we were both cowards."

Because he did not answer those earnest words, she looked with surprise into his face.

"Colonel Stuart, you don't rebuke me as you always used to do, and I can not recognize you so. Please to scold me, and have it over."

"I can not," he answered, gently. "Even in old times it was very hard, but now it seems impossible. Marjorie, you will never understand what made me often seem so hard and stern to you. Your words and acts were always more to me than those of any one else in the world, and this I was obliged to hide. I had the grief of seeing you behave to every one with more gentleness than to me, yet I dared not show the pain this gave me. I fancied that I understood better than any one the many sterling qualities which you so often either hid or marred, and—I loved you for them with all my heart and soul. Yet I never dared encourage this thought, or love—knowing that you were promised to Neil."

"I never could have married Neil," said Marjorie, in a tremulous whisper, as the shy, brilliant color burned in her cheeks, "even though I had promised."

"I have listened while you spoke to those you loved, as you *could* speak, Marjorie, with all your kind heart in your voice and eyes, and I have tried to fancy what it would be to *me* to listen to such words from you; but—as you know—you were always different to me."

"Always," faltered Marjorie, with sad gravity; "but if you know the reason of your own sternness, can you not guess the reason of my defiance? It was a poor, weak armor, after all."

"Marjorie! Marjorie!" he cried, with a wonderful new brightness on his face, "is this possible? Oh, my love, don't jest with me in this! I am too old a man to bear such a disappointment as you may be giving me now."

"However much I jested when you tried to teach me," she said, raising her eyes, in which the unshed tears were glistening, "I always tried to obey you in the end—because—I loved you."

"But, Marjorie," and the rare, slow tears of happiness were standing in his eyes, too, as he looked with questioning fear into her face—

"but, Marjorie, have you thought of this in any light but that of your own fearless generosity? Could you be happy with me, a comparatively old man, almost twenty years your senior?"

"Have *you* thought?" she answered, gently. "Could you be happy with a girl who all her lifelong has been vexing and hurting you; who has never been made a companion of by any one; who always frets and repines if things don't go quite smoothly; who was in the very act of fretting and repining when you came in?"

"My love," he said, and drew her close within his arms, "you fretful! you repining!—my bright, brave girl! I feel now that we can never have really misunderstood each other for one moment, because we are so close together now. Ah, Marjorie, I never guessed of this happiness in store for me. How could I? How dare I?"

"Because you are so old?" she questioned, the old, gentle, tremulous drollery on her lips.

"Well, let us say I have a smack of age in me, like Falstaff," he said, laughing; "but I was not thinking then of that."

"You had forgotten it for one moment?" she asked, more earnestness than laughter on her bright, sweet face. "Then do not think of any other—grievance. I knew always," she went on, softly, "that you saw my faults more clearly than any one else saw them; and so how can I feel that this is true? Can you really love me as I am?"

"Dearly, dearly, my precious one. I loved you always, even as you were in your most random, and, to me, unkind moods. I could not help it, hard as I tried and tried. I could not help it."

"Colonel Stu—"

"Colonel?" he echoed, laughing, as he gazed with ineffable tenderness far down into her shy eyes. "Is that my name for you, Marjorie?"

"Alick," the word came very timidly from her lips, but very tenderly withal, "Alick, will you—what are those words?—will you 'be to my virtues very kind, be to my faults a little blind?' But you always are, with every one, and so I think the faults will be fewer. Those bad, mutinous thoughts, which used to come when you were near me—because I felt so very far away—can never come again."

"Marjorie," said Colonel Stuart, after a pause, "I wish I were taking to Neil just such a happiness as I have now in my own heart."

"We must wait," she answered, wistfully; "I do believe it will come—I do, indeed. And these waiting months are not wasted for him, are they?"

"Indeed they are not."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

As Christmas drew near, Lady Athelston, though not, perhaps, weaker than she had been through the autumn, grew more despondent about herself, and more fretful over her son's continued absence, considering it a kind of melancholy duty to insist on others sharing as much as possible in *her own querulous gloom*, whenever Lina's bright *and cheering care would allow* her to do so. And *the girl, in the anxiety of* her ever-wakeful grief, tried and tried in vain to see how it would be wisest for her to act; knowing all the time that only her own heart could counsel her—a poor counselor ever, when duty and pride and inclination all pull different ways.

Hour after hour, in those long winter evenings, while Lady Athelston dozed upon her couch, Lina would sit before the fire, in solitary thought, wondering and wondering what it would be right for her to do.

If only some voice would whisper to her distinctly what was best, she would sigh. If only some mark would lie upon the way she ought to take, so that this anxious doubt might be at rest. But no voice could be heard, and no mark seen; and it was all left to her own heart, as she said sadly to herself, while her beautiful, anxious eyes sought vainly, in the dim, red aisles among the glowing coals for that answer which could be neither heard nor seen.

And then Neil's mother would awake repining; (as inherently selfish people generally do), and would wonder fretfully why Lina's letters failed to bring Neil home.

"You must write again, Lina. Why will you not insist on his coming? If you had given my messages, I am sure he would have been here; unless"—with a quick, questioning glance into the grave face—"unless you told him you would go away from here if he came. You know I could not spare *you*, and it is very cruel of you to propose it. I can not spare you, but I want Neil too. Oh, Lina, bring him home, and do not go away yourself. If you do, I shall die, with no one to understand me or help me—still, I want my boy."

And Lina could only turn the subject gently aside, and lead the mother's thoughts where she delighted for them to revel, until she again forgot all but the simple, easy happiness which the girl's love and care had given her, and the relief it was to have such a bright, unselfish little companion about the great, quiet house.

But the strain it was upon Lina so to hide the anxiety which weighed upon her day and night told gradually upon her. And, now that Christmas was near, she looked as pale and harassed as she had looked in that illness of hers in the early spring.

Once—after a tiresome day, only brightened by a long quiet talk with Marjorie Castillain, which left its influence strong and clear behind—in among her puzzled thoughts there came a sudden, rapid decision, as such decisions sometimes will rush in, to end those doubts which trouble us long and incomprehensibly. She rose from her spell of wondering thought, and began at once to write to Sir Neil. She would not wait to allow the old hesitation a moment's time to creep in. She would write without one more doubt. Lady Athelston's tearful entreaties were still in her ears; Marjorie's mute question lingered in her memory, and while she remembered these she would write. Not one of those arguments which her own heart had urged, as she sat thinking and thinking before the fire in the silent room, should make itself heard again. "Not one," she repeated, wearily, as she took up her pen.

Very few words, and very simple ones, she wrote to Neil. His mother longed for him to be with her through the Christmas-time, she said, and yet did not like to spare her. So (the pen

lingered here, but the trembling little hand led it briskly on) would he come and spend it with them both? He had said he would not come until she asked him, and so now she asked him. Would he come?

It was such a short and simple letter to cause any quickened heart-beats! Lina sent it in haste to the post-bag. How could she ever let it go, if she kept it long enough to think the old thought even once more?

After that, it seemed as if the whole household was in a state of expectation through every hour of every day. Once at least every five minutes, Neil's mother started, and said she heard him; while she could not, poor lady, even hear the wild December wind.

It was on the wildest night of all the week—while they sat in the luxurious warmth of the brilliant drawing-rooms, where Lady Athelston would always sit now in state, awaiting him—that he came. Among the angry voices of the wind and rain, neither the carriage wheels nor the hurrying footsteps were heard. So they did not know he had arrived, until he came in to them, tall and grand and handsome as of old; yet where of old there had been only leisurely, indolent grace, there was a firm and steadfast quietness now which altered him wonderfully.

His mother started from her couch, and Lina rose to meet him, for he must pass her first. A longing, intent look he gave into her face as he held her hand one minute in his clasp; then he passed on for his mother's rapturous welcome; and when he turned again, the girl was gone. For the hour before dinner, the mother and son sat alone, and Lina only joined them again when the meal was announced.

There had not been such a merry dinner at High Athelston for months as this was, though Marjorie was not there. Martin, stepping noiselessly about the room, marveled over the change in his master. The twin canaries, with one eye always on each other's deportment, opened the other to the widest extent, and gathered an unusual amount of anecdote to retail. Lina looked into Lady Athelston's beaming face, and said to herself, Yes, it was best that she had written to Neil that letter which had brought him home. Then she, too, went back to wonder at the change in him, though it seemed slighter to her than to any one, because she had guessed it from his letters. But though her beautiful, dark eyes had a look of relief in them, now that he was come, they never once met his with just that frank, proud gaze which had so firmly kept back hope from his heart in the old time.

"Take my arm, mother. You have been so long without any temptation to lean upon me, that I want you to learn the lesson at once."

He had risen from the table as Lady Athelston did so, having evidently no intention of being left behind.

"But I am going to my own room now, dear; I must go, even though you are here," she said, deprecatingly. "Don't you hasten away with us, Neil. It is rather solitary for you; I wish I had invited Alick Stuart."

"I don't want Stuart," Neil said, gayly, as he led his mother from the dining-room. "I want only what this house contains."

As they passed slowly up the lighted staircase, Neil paused with a momentary hesitation before one of the portraits of Sir Gerard Athelston, and looked from it over his shoulder, for Lina loitered behind them. The vague, unacknowledged resemblance was all explained to him now.

He lingered in his mother's dressing-room until she would let him stay no longer; then he went back to the drawing-room, and waited for Lina. "Surely she will come back, if only to say good-night to me," he thought, walking to and fro upon the velvet carpet.

But she never came. Neil's eyes seemed fastened to the door, which he had purposely left open, but no girlish figure passed it. One of the canaries brought in the tea, and Martin hovered about it in his grave curiosity. Neil caught eagerly at this straw of an idea.

"Tea, eh, Martin?" he said, in actual dread of how much of his thoughts the old butler could guess. "I will go and tell the ladies."

Of course, Martin's countenance was unmoved as usual, but there was something very like a smile in his sensations.

"I will find her," thought Neil, with a kind of apologetic excuse for himself, "and tell her Martin is waiting for her to come to tea."

Not with his mother, who was placidly enjoying her beauty sleep; not gone to her own room, as Margaret said when he met and questioned her; not in the library, where two great fires were having the Christmas laugh and conversation all to themselves; not in— A sudden thought struck Neil; he had not yet been into the blue morning-room, where she had been fond of sitting, as he well remembered, in old times. Surely she would be there.

Without waiting to know whether his quiet rap had been heard, he entered. No lamps were lighted here, but the fire shed a soft gold light upon the dainty blue furniture, and upon a solitary little figure in black, lying with dreamy stillness in a wide arm-chair.

For a few moments Neil stood unseen, gazing, with all his heart in his eyes, at the beautiful, grave figure, wrapped and fondled in the rich, caressing light. Then he came forward, as grave as she, his blue eyes full of earnest love and untold longing.

He did not take a seat beside her, but stood opposite, against the low chimney-piece. Then he made his prepared and commonplace little speech, but he looked at her with as great a reverence as if the black-robed girl had been his queen, and the blue silk chair the very throne of England.

"Martin is hovering about the drawing-room with tea, Miss Athelston."

"I have taken tea," she answered, glancing at him with almost a startled glance. "I took it with Lady Athelston in her own room. I generally do."

"Then it may go," said Neil, quietly.

A little pause then; the girl leaning forward in her big arm-chair, with the intense stillness which, in her, was always begotten of any nervous dread or anxiety; the young man standing before her, big and tall and strong above his fellows, yet with his heart beating and his lips shaking like a woman's, because he felt that he was near her once again, and free to love her and to offer her his love. It was no insult now to lay at her feet the heart in which she had reigned alone so long.

He broke the silence presently.

"I have not yet thanked you for your letter. You can never even dream what joy it was to me to receive your summons home—I mean here."

"No—home," said Lina, only because he paused and waited for her words.

"Still less can you dream what joy it is to me to be here. How long may I stay?"

She looked up at him again with the startled gaze.

"You—you will know," she said, softly. "As long, I hope, as your mother wishes."

"Lina, you will forgive me that I do not speak as wiser men would do at such a time. From the first, dear, my love has been a cause of suffering to myself and to you; so I can hardly trust myself to look it in the face calmly, as other men might, and to tell you of it by degrees. I can only stay here, Lina, as—your husband. May I stay?"

The unusual quietness of his voice struck Lina oddly, while his face was white and trembling in the passion of his love.

"Sir Neil," she said, gently, as she rose in her desire to reach the door, "stay with your mother."

"And with you?"

The answer she had striven to evade was waited for with breathless eagerness. She smiled, a little nervous smile which rippled oddly on her lips, while her eyes were grave and serious.

"And with you, Lina?"

The question was repeated with a still greater eagerness, and the answer still more anxiously waited for.

It came in the softest whisper. "Yes."

"With you?—with you, Lina?—with my wife?" The questions rushed from his lips brokenly, in his joy. "Oh, my beloved! is it to be so?—will you be happy so?—for, immense as my love is, it shall not bring you misery again. My own love—my own and only love—can you be happy as my wife—my treasured, cherished wife? Can you? Just whisper it, as you whispered that other precious 'yes.'"

And she whispered it.

Closely and tightly he held her in his arms, with a protecting, fostering love; but the look of reverence still shone deep down in his blue eyes, as he drank his happiness thirstily from the pure and truthful depths of hers.

"My little treasure, won at last!" he murmured. "My priceless treasure! What a future you have given me, Lina! Without you, all my years would have been aimless, as were those years before I knew you. With you, it will be all different. Such a life mine may be now, perhaps, Lina, as the real master of High Athelston would have lived here."

These words she could not answer. Her grief had been too deep and solitary a one to have it brought back to her, even yet, by the words of others.

"I think of him often," the young man went on, gravely, "and I am always the better and the stronger for such thought. Now, we can talk together how he would have acted, and I know I shall make a better master, a better friend, a better man altogether, for trying to do as he would have done. You are stronger, my love—you are stronger and better, are you not?" he broke off, raising her drooping face, and gazing into it with untold fondness; "and your life shall be easy and restful now, as it has never been. Lina, Lina"—in a whisper of happy emotion—"look up and meet my eyes just once, and say you love me. No, that is too much for me to ask; look up and meet my eyes just once, and tell me that I may stay with you for always."

She looked up slowly, her eyes most beautiful in their perfect trust, and she answered him in clear, soft, happy tones,

"Neil, I want you to stay with me always."

Then with what deep and passionate gratitude did he hold her to his heart, while his lips clave to hers in their first kiss.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

The fire and lamp were burning brightly in Mrs. Cheere's little parlor, and at the table sat Jet, making, in his drawing-book, a rather distorted copy of one of the illustrations in Colonel Stuart's lately published work on Highshire—the one book which Dorcas prized; which she was among the first to buy (though such an expensive literary treasure she had never dreamed before of purchasing), and which was even already beginning to look worn and damaged from the contact of the untiring fingers which turned the pictured leaves.

Jet was stooping very much, and his brows were knitted; but even with those advantages he could not, as it seemed, obtain an artistic effect, for his rather smeared imitation of one of the Churchill views failed entirely in winning the approval of the little artist and critic himself—a sure sign that the boy had either real talent or a pure taste.

"Perhaps, granny," he said, meditatively, as he gave his pencil a suck which might be professional, but certainly was not elegant—"perhaps I might make it more like, if you could just help me a bit now and then, like—like father used."

"But, you see, I don't know any thing about it, dear. You must get on as well as you can by yourself at present."

The old woman's eyes were soft and gentle behind her spectacles, as she sat close to the child, knitting him stockings, and watching the progress of his work with the greatest interest, and the most pleasant and unconcealed ignorance of its defects. But his last words made her thoughtful, as his inadvertently uttered wish to learn any thing always did.

Ought she to send the boy away to school at cost of any loneliness to herself, while she knew she could not afford to send him to such a one as she let her thoughts build upon for him? Or ought she to send him every morning into Churchill, where the education would be still more widely different from that one on which she had fixed her hopes for him? For those quiet eyes behind the glasses could wander miles and miles away beyond the cottage-gate, and often did now, seeing wide, dazzling pictures of her boy's after-life; sunny scenes, in which he should work his life's work well and bravely, and where she should leave him some day, that she might go and tell it all to his mother in heaven, and to

some one else who had loved the child, and would remember him even there.

But at present it seemed that the start for him was unattainable. He ought to be at school, and at a good school; yet she could not afford it (for the money old Mr. Dymocke had left him was not to be touched until he came of age). Nor could she either bear to part with him, or to separate him from Jack Esdaile, who was not going to any public school until his father's return from abroad, and who, as Dorcas full well knew, was the best friend that her boy could have.

It was just as she was thinking of him, that Jack himself came into the room, with his bright, familiar, yet always courteous, greeting.

"Mrs. Cheere," he cried, letting his momentarily subdued excitement break out again, "please I'm come to fetch you and Jet to The Anchorage! Who do you think came to-day? Papa, yes, really papa—my own father, you know, Jet, who's been away for years. Yes, he's come, Mrs. Cheere, and he wants to see you—you and Jet. And the brougham's at the gate, and I'm to wait for you, and not take any refusal. Please come quick, Mrs. Cheere. Make haste, Jet. I long to show you my father. He's—"

The boy was suddenly stayed by the memory which Jet's wistful eyes had awakened. Had it been cruel to talk so gleefully of the return of his father to the child whose father never would return? He passed his arm lovingly through Jet's, and whispered to him, with a bright, affectionate smile,

"He wants particularly to see you, Jet. Do you know he seems as anxious to see *you* as he was to see me!"

Dorcas donned her best bonnet and muffled herself for the cold drive, then overlooked Jet's muffling.

"You both run down to the carriage while the light is here to guide you," she added, turning out the two little great-coated and comfortered figures; "I'll leave the door open, and follow when I've put out the lamp and locked up."

"I'm glad he's come," she murmured to herself, as she waited to be sure of the last spark dying out, "for many people's sakes. Now, I suppose, Colonel Stuart and Miss Marjorie will be married. I knew she'd never go to be mistress at The Anchorage, to turn out Mrs. Esdaile, though she'd make up all kinds of excuses sooner than let *that* out. Yes, I'm glad enough he's come; but he can't really want to see us."

The eyes of Mrs. Cheere—so long accustomed to her own small rooms and small companion, and, more than that, coming straight in from the darkness of the winter night—were utterly dazzled in the drawing-room at The Anchorage, among what seemed to her a perfect crowd of happy, excited people. It took her a good many minutes, and two cups of Mrs. Esdaile's fragrant tea, to fit her to comprehend what they were saying.

"I little thought, as you may guess," said Colonel Stuart, after trying, in his kindly, easy way, to make it clear to her, "that the answer I sent to that 'next-of-kin' advertisement was destined for my own brother-in-law."

"I was delighted," put in Mr. Esdaile, pleasantly, "to find, when Messrs. Beard and Cartwright forwarded me the letter, that the next of kin I sought was to be found in the neighborhood to which I was soon coming. For that reason I did not answer the letter, wishing to bring the news myself."

"But—but, Colonel Stuart," stammered Dorcas, "how can it be? The advertisement was for next of kin of—Eustace Jelfrey."

"Yes," answered Mr. Esdaile, with a nod and a smile, "and it was *I* who had it inserted—another proof, isn't it, of the smallness of the world? Let me tell you now what I knew of Eustace Jelfrey," he said, as they all sat listening in the light and warmth. "I was sitting, one day, alone in my tent, writing home, just after deciding to leave the diamond fields altogether, when a man entered in haste and fear, and begged for a little water for his master. I happened to have a little, which I was then boiling to purify, for what we bought was sometimes the very filthiest. By sight I knew this man as the servant (or perhaps more properly the partner) of a young-looking, handsome man who had only lately landed and joined us, yet who had had already quite unprecedented and exceptional success."

"He always succeeded in every thing, I think," put in Marjorie Castillain, her bright eyes flashing angrily at the thought.

"But wait, Marjorie," interposed Mrs. Esdaile, gently, "until you hear the end."

"The end," resumed her husband, quietly, "would totally shatter any one's idea of success for him. I do not suppose it could fall to any man's share to witness such a death more than once; but I hope my own may happen before I have to be present at such another."

"Was there no repentance?" asked Colonel Stuart, with his arm round the child, who stood intently listening to this story of his father's death—the father whom he never had, and never could call so.

"No repentance. There was literally no power for it, so all-engrossing and all-dominant was the awful horror. There was not even faith enough for the very weakest thought of penitence. There was only the frantic, hopeless certainty that unknown horrors awaited him, horrors whose grasping power it was too late now to elude; and wild, ceaseless crying to know what these horrors could be. And, with these, always that burning, feverish thirst, which could not be appeased. Death had become familiar enough to me there—as you may judge when I tell you that between thirty and forty died among us every day—but such a death as this, thank God! could never grow to be familiar. It was so long in coming, too; just as if the strength of despair in the man could really keep the dreaded visitant at bay. For sixteen days he fought with fierce strength against the coming of death, and of that doom which he feared after death. I had taken the water to him at first (for I would not keep the man, even while I prepared it) in simple pity. Being used to the fevers that were rife among us, and strong enough always myself, I knew that I should be of use; but from that time I hardly left Jelfrey's tent. I sent away his servant, or partner, or whatever he called himself, and the Kaffers, to stay with my servant; for I could not bear that they should hear the frantic cries of the miserable dying man. It seemed, too, even from the very first, that he liked to have me with him.

His eyes would follow me eagerly about the tent, and he would call me, with the passionate fretfulness of a child, if he lost sight of me. But from the moment he heard my name, and I—in the vain attempt to soothe him—spoke of home and friends in England, this grew even more persistent. When he was conscious, his fear of my leaving him was like that of an infant terrified by the darkness. When delirious, he would spring from his mattress and hold me in a strong grip. In some moods he would *defy* me to leave him alone in torments. In others, he would appeal to me, sobbing in the utter weakness of his abject terror. But I never wished to leave him. All I wanted, both for him and for myself, my servants brought me to the tent-door; and my very anxiety kept me beside him, my great anxiety to tempt him to cry and pray—however far off he felt—for the mercy and compassion of his God."

"Lina," said Marjorie, softly, "you remember that other death-bed? How gladly Eustace Jelfrey then would have changed with his—victim."

"We can feel sure of that," replied Mr. Esdaile, gravely. "No greater agony did man ever witness than this sinner's agony of fear, on which, now and then, fell another agony, that of feeling what *might* have been. As I told you, from the very first he could not bear me to leave him, simply, I thought, from the fact of my being an Englishman like himself; but after he heard my name, he was still more unwilling to lose sight of me. He knew how my name was connected with his former life; and he knew my friends were among those he had injured. His only relief was in telling me of all this. It seemed as if he must speak of his crimes and faults to me, because he could not speak of them to his Judge. I saw there was hardly one act of his life which he could look back upon without horror, and I wondered skeptically (as I listened through those long, awful nights) why such power had been given to this man. Then I thought what he might have been, if these powers had been used for good. He would have been one to rise among men, and to build himself a name and reputation. As it was, I could only hear how every selfish plan of his had worked the end he wished, and could only think how much more heavily than upon the ignorant and unlearned the responsibility of all this guilt would lie. And this he knew as well as I did."

"Of course, he confessed that forgery to you, Mr. Esdaile?" questioned Marjorie.

"Yes; among other things, none of which I need tell you, except that he swam from that pool in the valley almost immediately after—his fall. He had known exactly what his position was when he began to fight, and how the mine lay, and he tempted his antagonist with a view to—to what afterward occurred. Though that had been no previously arranged plan, the temptation could not be resisted, and he felt he would leave the neighborhood himself, if by doing so he could insure the ruin of—your brother and yourself, Miss Athelston, though he did not speak of you by that name, but by one I knew well, and recognized. He found the valley deserted when he swam to shore, and he fled at once, making his escape cleverly, with the help of timely concealment and disguise, and leaving the foul stain of murder on the man he had wronged. After all these confessions, and those of the before-time and the after-time, came always the one request which he urged upon me. Would I undertake that the two thousand pounds which he had amassed by his skill and success (as we blindly speak of success), as well as his income of two hundred pounds a year, which he had not been able to claim since his reported murder, should be remitted to his son, of whom he knew literally nothing. So, after his death, I sent my solicitors an advertisement for the *Times*. When the answer to this was forwarded to me, and I found the name and address of Jelfrey's son were furnished me by my own brother-in-law, I determined to wait, and bring the acknowledgment and the news to him myself. So, Jesse—is not that your name, my little fellow?—you are, you see, the possessor of a fortune of your own, which I shall be glad to hand over, or invest, just as your grandmother advises. She is your guardian now, I hear."

"Granny, Colonel Stuart"—the child was looking from one to the other in pained bewilderment—"will it be right to take it? Would—would dad have told me to take it?"

Lina's head was drooped, and both hands went up to hide her eyes.

"Jet," said Neil, gently touching Lina's hands with one of his, and drawing the child to her with the other, "come and ask dad's sister. She will know."

But Marjorie, seeing that Lina could not look up to meet their eyes, answered for her.

"I think we may be glad that Eustace Jelfrey's money can do some good, as he never did any himself. And it will be clearing his memory just a little for us to use it. It will be," added the girl, jumping to pleasant conclusions in her own peculiar style, "it will be like doing him a good turn, and therefore exactly what Gerard Athelston would have done."

"At any rate, we shall be acting according to the request of a dying man," added Colonel Stuart, not quite seeing it as Marjorie did, yet knowing how wisely and honorably the father's property could be used for the neglected son, "and so I feel that we ought to do as Jelfrey asked—eh, Mrs. Cheere?"

"How prosperous Mr. Jelfrey must have been in all he undertook!" put in Mrs. Esdaile.

"Satan is a very remunerative fellow to serve," replied her husband. "He always pays well—in the present."

"How clever Mr. Jelfrey must have been!" mused Dorcas, recovering her breath slowly.

"What a different use he might have made of his talents!" said Neil, more thoughtfully than any one guessed.

"Isn't it true that there are no such dreary words in the world as 'it might have been?'"

No one answered. Marjorie's half-whispered words, because they went too near the hearts of all who were there.

Later on in the evening, as Dorcas prepared to leave, Colonel Stuart detained her.

"We have a proposal to make to you, Mrs. Cheere," he said. "Mr. and Mrs. Esdaile are going to settle in our neighborhood, I'm delighted to say, and to send Jesse to the Bleaborough grammar school. No boy could go to a better, as we all know, and as you yourself have often said when we have been talking over 'unattain-

able wishes.' Well, what do you think of sending Jet too? It is quite in your power now."

"I shall be very glad for the boys not to be separated," put in Mrs. Esdaile, kindly noticing how the words that Dorcas wanted to utter would not come from her shaking lips.

"I think it a famous plan," added Mr. Esdaile, seeing this also, and putting in his own cheering words to help her.

"How kind!" faltered Dorcas, presently. "Can you really, really consent for your boy to grow up with—his?"

"We think of him as Gerard's boy," said Mrs. Esdaile, gently, "and we really want you not to separate your little grandson from Jack."

"Sir Gerard Athelston himself would have been glad for them to grow up together," said Colonel Stuart, quietly.

Poor Dorcas! This last and most thoughtful proof of the good opinion of these friends who had so utterly forgiven and forgotten her complaining discontent, entirely broke down her self-reliance, and she could but let her tears have their own way.

"I can not help it," she moaned, apologetically, as Jet's caressing little hands drew down hers, and she looked up to meet Marjorie's bright eyes —"I can not help it, Miss Marjorie. I was thinking if my little girl could only see this prosperity come to her child, and know how good you all are to him, and to me, for his sake—or for the sake of him that was good to us both. I'm a weak and selfish old woman; I've been hard and ill-tempered all my life, but this makes me more of a child than—than my own grandchild."

"And don't you think your little girl *does* see your happiness, and her child's?" whispered Marjorie, softly. "I think so."

"Then you will consider our plan, will you?" asked Mr. Esdaile, wishing to cheer her again, "and we will discuss it further presently. I shall be all over the country for the next few days, looking for a house, so we shall be popping in to see you and arrange this."

"Colonel Stuart—please—Colonel Stuart—"

He had walked aside from the group to ring the bell for the brougham again; and Jet, who had followed him, was gently and modestly trying to win his sole and entire attention. "Colonel Stuart—may I ask you something, please?"

"A hundred things, my lad, if you have a hundred that want answering."

"Colonel Stuart, father didn't kill—Mr. Jelfrey at all, did he?"

"Not at all," was the colonel's emphatic answer, as he smiled to hear to whom the loving name was given and to whom the formal title.

"Then, Colonel Stuart, that—that promise, you know, about the monument, doesn't matter now?"

"No, dear," the colonel answered, pleased that the thought which had struck them all gladly, long before, had come so quickly to the child too.

"And—and, Colonel Stuart, is that money for me, for me to do what I like with, because—oh! Colonel Stuart, may I—I don't know how to say it—may I do for father what he did for my own mother?"

Clear and bright, the full meaning of the wish flashed into the heart of the listener, and he put his arm about the eager, trembling little speaker, with a sudden dimness even in his own brave eyes.

"You shall do your share, dear little lad," he whispered; "but there are many of us who love his memory so well that we can not be left out in a task like this. We have been talking of it to-day; but you did not know this when the thought came to you. I am glad of that. Yours shall not be the least share in this, my child, as yours was not the least share in his love and teaching."

CHAPTER XLVII.

IN MEMORIAM.

It was a sweet and calm spring evening; its very air rich with unspoken thoughts, its very beauty breathing happiness. To Neil Athelston, sitting in the church-porch, while the slanting sunbeams lingered tenderly among the graves, there was even another reminder of happiness; for over the iron gates of the church-yard stretched the foundation of what, upon the morrow, would be a dainty arch of pure white flowers, and which spoke to him of the joy which was to be his. For this morrow was to be his marriage-day—his and Lina's—and not only that, but it was to be Colonel Stuart's and Marjorie's too; and both the brides were to go from High Athelston, and the magnificent and lavish preparations for the ceremony were understood to be equally in honor of both.

Lady Athelston, and Sir Neil too, had been particular about this; knowing what a failure a festival at the manor would be, at a time when Marjorie could take no part as hostess. Lady Athelston's will had been in this case purely kind, and (a great deal more astonishing) she had succeeded in working it without assistance.

In her delight at the marriage of her son with the heiress of High Athelston, and the girl she had grown to love so well, the failure of her first scheme for him grew into absolute self-gratulation; and, feeling so thoroughly contented herself, she determined on doing all in her power to add to the happiness of the girl who certainly had never been able to appreciate Neil, but of whom she had always been fond, even though she had never learned to depend and lean upon her, just as she had so soon learned to depend and lean upon the gentle, grave girl, who was to be Neil's wife.

So the sumptuous and gorgeous preparations which she delighted to order were ordered equally for the two brides and the friends of the two brides.

Old Mr. Castillain chuckled a good deal over this, reckoning how many pounds it would save him, yet thanklessly pronouncing it "a whim of the old lady's." And the "old lady's" very kindest and most generous act of all was her reticence about having any cause for the whim, save her fondness for Marjorie and great respect for Colonel Stuart. She never pretended to have noticed Louisa's cold, sarcastic words and behavior about these marriages. She only told her pleasantly that, on the strength of long friendship, she had determined to adopt Marjorie for that occasion, if she and Mr. Castillain would allow her. And, of course, Louisa, who looked forward herself delightedly to the wedding gayeties at High Athelston, knowing she would be the very handsomest among the twelve brides-maids,

said nothing but that it was "very nice," and then went home to laugh over it with the squire.

He had been so much put out by the breaking off of the match between his younger daughter and Sir Neil, that he had hardly even yet recovered his temper; but three circumstances went a long way toward enabling him to do so. The first was Sir Neil Athelston's open, fearless declaration that, except the baronetage, he had no claim upon the Athelston lands or wealth; the second was the pleasant financial arrangement Colonel Stuart proposed for the wife (much more interesting to the old gentleman than the manly declaration of love); and the third was the expense of the wedding being saved for him.

So it was that Neil's mother—always led by some one—had so long now been led by wise and unsuspicious hands, that this thoughtful, generous reserve seemed only natural to her; and working her own will kindly, she was loved the better for insisting on it.

If Lina had been consulted, she would have chosen what is called "a quiet wedding," but on this subject she never *was* consulted, except in gay defiance of her choice; and she understood at once Lady Athelston's generous, as well as proud, desire that all splendor should be shed upon the marriage of her only son.

"The county people will expect it, my dear; and it is due from us, in our position here, to gratify them. I wish them all to see what rejoicing I make over his marriage with the dear little friend from whom I was once tempted to turn suspiciously. And" (with a smile) "why should Marjorie have a 'quiet wedding,' when she never has been at all a quiet person?"

So the morrow of this sweet spring evening was to be such a day as Churchill had but rarely seen. There were arches of evergreens (blossoming flags and mottoes) both at the foot and summit of the steep street; flags waved all round the quaint old pump and lamp-post midway; and there was to be (the only one left until the morrow) a magnificent arch of spring flowers and dainty fern, above the leopards passants on the entrance gates at High Athelston.

Besides that, there was a restless, expectant spirit of excitement rife everywhere; from the wealthy aristocratic families of Highshire, who would all be represented at High Athelston on the morrow, to the cottagers' children, who were out-of-doors now, watching the progress of the preparations; from the shop-keepers and private families in Churchill, who were all inclined to take holiday and join the universal merry-making, to the workmen and laborers who had it given them, and would have substantial cause to make the day a festival.

And Marjorie was to be as a daughter of the house at High Athelston through these few hours, and was to leave it a bride, as honored and petted as was the little mistress who had never claimed or even owned that title.

Sir Neil sat quite still in the shadowy porch, looking out upon the tender, sunlit green of the spring trees, and thinking, in the stillness of his great gratitude, of the happiness which had been given to him. And the deep and pure content which filled his heart shone in his eyes, and made *them beautiful indeed* in their long, long, quiet *gaze.*

"*Alone, Athelston?*"

The dream was broken by this greeting, as Colonel Stuart came round the porch from a side-path.

"Marjorie forbade me to go to Hawkedale to-day," he explained, as he leaned opposite Sir Neil, against the old stone porch. "She said she wished to spend her last day at home undisturbed; but she confessed that, as they drove to High Athelston, she should dismount here, if Louisa would allow her, and stop a few minutes to show Jet the monument. She promised him, so I know she will come. If to-morrow were her wedding-day a hundred times over, she would not forget her promise to a child."

"We hoped to see her at High Athelston earlier to-day," said Neil, smiling assent to the colonel's last words, "at least, I did. Lina was always sure she would wish to spend to-day at home. Now she will only arrive with Louisa among a host of other guests, not before yourself, I hope, Stuart."

"Thank you. But what a crowd of us you are entertaining to-night! It is too bad, considering what High Athelston is going to do to-morrow."

"We like it," said Neil, genially. "You should see my mother's lively delight in the anticipation, and her indefatigable system of improvement in every thing. She never will, I am sure, leave off issuing improved editions of every order, until it is too late to issue an order at all; and does she not act her part well now—in spite of her sad deafness?"

"Wonderfully well," assented the colonel, with heartiness, "and she looks happy enough to make us all so. Her strength is steadily returning, I'm rejoiced to see."

"Worry always pulled her down," smiled Neil, "and ease has plucked her up—ease and Lina."

"Is Miss Athelston within?" asked the colonel, glancing at the closed church-door.

"Yes. I knew she would like to be alone when she first saw Gerard's monument. Even to myself, this morning, it was most sad, with its beauty and its associations; to her I knew it would be so—especially to-day. After to-day, Stuart, there will be no grief or sadness of hers—as there will be no joy, I trust—which may not be mine too."

"After to-day," echoed the colonel, with quiet gladness in his tone. "Neil, dear fellow, I can hardly believe it even yet."

"I can," answered Sir Neil, with a quick brilliance in his eyes. "And I catch myself pitying every one I meet, because he can not have my happiness. Fool, eh, Stuart?"

But the colonel was far enough from indorsing this, when he saw how the brightness of the young man's self-congratulation was not dimmed by one atom of self-pride.

At this moment the great Hawkedale britzska drove up to the gates, but apparently Miss Castillain did not relish the idea of waiting there, for the carriage drove on toward High Athelston, while Marjorie and little Jet walked together through the church-yard.

"I did obey you, Marjorie," began the colonel, taking her hand with a glad smile of greeting; "but I could not resist coming to meet you here."

"May Jet go in to Lina, Marjorie?" questioned Neil, softly, as they came into the cool, dim porch.

"She will like to show the monument to Gerard's boy, and we have all seen it."

Neil opened the door for the child, as he spoke; then they three waited together, Marjorie seating herself in a corner of the old seat.

Presently Jet came back to them, his step slower and softer even than usual, his eyes wet, and his lips twitching.

"Oh, it's beautiful!" he cried, his hands locked in Marjorie's lap, as he looked up into her face through his tears. "Oh, it's beautiful! and I'm so glad. I'm so glad it's beautiful—oh, father!"

The little shaking figure was clasped in Marjorie's arms, and the broken words were stayed with kisses.

"It is beautiful, dear, because it is like him."

When the suddenly renewed passion of grief was quieted, Jet raised his face again wistfully.

"Miss Marjorie, now may I tell granny to come? She does so want to come this evening—by herself, before she comes to-morrow, when the church will be so beautiful and full. May I tell her now?"

As the child left the porch, Neil entered the church alone, and, standing a moment just within the door, looked with eyes full of love and sympathy at the slight figure, leaning with its face hidden against the curtained rail of the great Athelston pew.

Then his glance rested upon the splendid monument above. Prominent even among the Athelstons was this one at which he gazed, while he walked slowly up the white-carpeted aisle. The exquisite marble figure of Gerard Athelston, life-like in its attitude and expression, was beautiful, just as he had been beautiful; though the marble might be whiter and colder than death, while to him had always belonged essentially the warmth of happiness and the healthful strength of manhood. Though chiseled only from a photograph, the figure was life-like in its resemblance, as well as exquisite in its easy grace and winning beauty. On the marble column beside it was engraved the simple inscription,

SACRED TO

THE LOVED AND CHERISHED MEMORY OF

SIR GERARD DYMOCKE ATHELSTON,

BARONET, OF HIGH ATHELSTON,

ONLY SON OF SIR GERARD ATHELSTON,

AND MAGDALEN, HIS FIRST WIFE.

Born September 19th, 1842: Died May 31st, 1871.

"HE THAT JUDGETH ME IS THE LORD."

Neil's eyes lingered to the last upon the words; then he took Lina's drooping figure in his arms, and woke her to his presence with a long and tender kiss.

"Lina, my darling, there is no name in all our line, long as that is, which we can be proud of as we must always be of his. But I can hope *now* that there may be others, some day, worthy to inherit it from him. Does it give you pain to read it, dearest?"

"No," she answered, looking up with a steadfast calm in her beautiful, dark eyes; "no, it was not pain. Looking there seems to strengthen me—almost as his words used to strengthen me—that is why I staid so long."

"Alick," whispered Marjorie, as she, too, and Colonel Stuart, came softly up and stood before the monument, "I am glad to feel it will be here to-morrow. To think of *him* will be good for me, even then."

"And for me, too," he answered, clasping tightly the hand that lay in his. "It will always be good for me, recalling, as it does, the life a man *may* lead through good report or evil."

"*He that judgeth me is the Lord.*"

For a few minutes they were all silent, in the holy silence of the place, reading once more those words which had had the power of bringing Gerard back, to meet, with calm and trustful bravery, the judgment of his fellow-men.

THE END.

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